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# Language Policy vrs Language Reality in the Ghanaian Classroom: A Study of Colleges of Education

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**Abstract**

This descriptive qualitative study attempted to understand, explore and report the occasions and reasons for which a tutor or a student would use the native language in the second language classroom in a national language policy context, like Ghana, where such practice is disallowed. To use the L1 in the L2 classroom or not has been an ongoing debate in Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TESOL, TEFL), in that, while a group insists on a strict monolingual English-only ESL classroom, another group thinks a reasonable quantity of L1 and appropriate use of same in the ESL classroom could actually facilitate the teaching and learning of English. Data collection instruments were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participants were 13 language tutors and 53 second-year language specialism students, all from four Colleges of Education, and selected through purposive sampling. Results revealed that L1 is used as functional strategy in the L2 classroom, and serves various reasons; empathy, classroom management, identity, lack of comprehension, nurturing bilingualism. It is recommended, therefore, that, the national language policy of Ghana which limits the language of classroom instruction to English be made lax enough to allow for some appreciable amount of the L1 to aid 'understanding', which is the bedrock of education.

*Keywords:* national language policy; Applied Linguistics; TESL/TEFL; monolingual; bilingualism.

## 1. Introduction

The role, use and utilization of the mother tongue or native language (L1) to facilitate the teaching and learning of second language has, over the recent past decades, in the field of Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL), been a very contentious yet-to-be-resolved scholarly research and debate (Guthrie, 1987; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Nizegorodcew, 1996; Tang, 2002; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Mart, 2013; Bhootha, Azman & Kemboja, 2014). The dominant argument for and approach towards the teaching and learning of second language has been an advocacy for an English-only second language learning environment even though in recent years, the counter argument in support of the employment of the L1 in the L2 classroom has gained some appreciable acceptance and prominence among language scholars (Cummins, 2007). The defendants of the monolingual approach advocate that when the second language is the sole language of instruction in the second language classroom, it increases the exposure of the learners to the L2 and thus enhances their learning of same. These defendants do not see any significant role that the L1 should play in the English classroom and decry that if learners are exposed to the L1, they will be deprived of valuable input in the second language and their progress in the learning of same will be impeded (Auerbach, 1993; Macaro, 2001; Bouangeune 2009). In fact, in Chambers (1992) and Cook (2001), second language instructors who are prone to using the L1 to facilitate the teaching of L2 are looked down upon and described as inadequate pedagogues.

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However, the attitude and position of language scholars towards the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom has generally been that the former, if the need be to introduce it in the latter, should be as minimal as much as possible such that the L2 be, predominantly, used to carry out L2 instruction (Turnbull, 2001). However, the exponents of the use of the native language in the second language classroom argue that when the students are given some exposure to the L1 in the L2 classroom, it helps them acquire the latter more efficiently and effectively. They equally opine that there has not been any empirical research or evidence that either disproves the efficiency of the L1 in the L2 classroom or suggests that the L1 impedes the effective learning of the L2 (Atkinson, 1987; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Tang, 2002; Nation, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Sharma, 2006; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Salah & Farrah 2012; Machaal, 2012; Bhootha, Azman & Kemboja, 2014).

As could be observed from the foregoing, those who insist on an English-only approach and policy to the teaching and learning of second language and advocate that the L1 be completely prohibited in the L2 environment believe that when that is done, the learning of the L2 will be effectively enhanced. Until the last two to three decades, the widespread assertion and belief has been that the learners should be given maximum exposure to the L2 if they would be able to learn more effectively. Any other exposure was considered to be a distraction. The other school of thought, quite a modern one, which thinks that the L1 could be introduced in the L2 environment in an appropriate manner and on occasions where it is indispensably needed, opines that L1 should not be completely prohibited from the L2 environment and that when the former is effectively utilised, it will facilitate the learning of the L2 (Mart, 2013). Even though Krashen (1985) and other language acquisition theorists hold the strict view that the learning of second language can be done and achieved adequately in a learning milieu in which the target or second language is spoken, the recent increasing interest in the introduction of the L1 in the ESL classroom cannot be overlooked. Cook's (2001) conviction is that, if using the L1 appropriately in the L2 classroom could facilitate the teaching and learning of the latter and ensure efficiency, then it must not be neglected.

Nevertheless, these long standing L1 in L2 classroom debate has not been sufficiently investigated and explored to understand and bring to light whether the L1 facilitates, enhances and does not impede the learning of the L2 in the Ghanaian colleges of education contexts. It is this backdrop that renders a study into the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom in the Ghanaian context fairly timely and appropriate. Thus, this study examines and reports the use of native language in the English Language classroom by students and tutors of Language, that is, English, Fante and French, at the College of Education in Ghana. It aimed at finding out whether the L1 is used at all, and if it is, to what extent and to what end or for what reasons.

### *1.1. Research Objectives*

The study attempts to
1. identify the contexts in which the native language is used in the English classroom.
2. describe how the use of the L1 impacts on the teaching and learning of English.

### *1.2. Research Questions*

This study attempts at providing answers to the following inquiry.
1. What contexts necessitates the use of the native language in the English classroom?
2. How does the use of the L1 impact on the teaching and learning of English?

### *1.3. Significance of the Study*

The study will better enlighten language policy makers, educators and tutors on why learners wish or not wish that the L1 is used in the English classroom. This will influence the methods, approaches and techniques they employ in the teaching of English language in the best manner possible (Al Sharaeai, 2012). The result of the study will also throw some light on the learners' preferred contexts for the L1 use. This will help language tutors to know when and at what points in time during the teaching of English that they would have to make use of the L1 as a reference tool or

resource pool. The study may eventually lead to the general improvement in the teaching and learning of English with a consequential improvement on the English language competencies and skills of the students.

## 2. The Evolution and Development of L1 in the ESL Classroom

Different approaches and eras on the teaching and learning of English have seen, understood and treated the L1 in different ways. Generally, the historical contexts and development of the L1 in the ESL classroom situate the arguments in two broad frameworks- the monolingual English-only policy in the ESL classroom and bilingual English-L1 policy (Mora Pablo, Lengeling, Rubio Zenil, Crawford & Goodwin, 2011). This session looks at each specific era or method and how it incorporated or disbanded the use of the L1 in the ESL classroom.

The first method is the Grammar-Translation Method of teaching and learning of English. This method was officially developed and advanced around the 18th century. The major aim of this method was study the grammar of English very critically and translate texts written in English into the L1 of the learner (Brooks-Lewis, 2009). In this method, L1 instructors and linguists were normally employed as teachers of English and they did not necessarily have to be able speak the English language (Lindsay & Knight, 2006). This method made a complete use of the L1 in the ESL classroom. In fact, the L1 was the go-to resource in the English class. English and L1 were used on a 50/50 rate in the L2 class.

Later, around the early 20th century, the second method, which is The Direct Method was advanced to phase out the Grammar-Translation Method. It was supposed to deal with the problems and challenges that were associated with the Grammar-Translation Method. With the Direct Method, the English language was taught "directly" in English. It gave no space to the L1 in the English class. Lessons were conducted solely in English (Lindsay & Knight, 2006). It eradicated the L2-L1 translation system of the first method.

After the Direct Method era came the Natural and Audio-Lingual Method eras where, though officially had the L1 disbanded in the ESL classroom, were not very "strict" in keeping the L1 away from the L2 class. These methods were quite accommodating of the L1. They indict the teaching of second language profession to have a rethink of the use of the L1 irrespective of the language classroom context. Brooks-Lewis (ibid) describes the pedagogic use of the L1 in the L2 classroom with such expressions as *limited use, interference, exclusion of the L1, L1 is extraneous,* etc. These expressions give a clear picture of how the L1 was viewed in the L2 classroom under the Natural and Audio-Lingual Methods and also help to appreciate the issue and contextualise it in a deeper perspective (Mora Pablo et al, 2011).

The last and current method is the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT). All over the world, this method is and has been widely used in the teaching and learning of language (Auerbach, 1993). With this method, focus has been shifted from learning merely about the language to the learning of how to communicate in the language (Mora Pablo et al, ibid). This method does not encourage the excessive use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. The L2 is the only language of instruction and the use of the L1 is frowned upon. Immersing the student in the learning of the L2 is the idea behind this CLT method and hence, it is assumed that the best way to do the immersion is to avoid or limit the L1 use in the L2 learning environment. The language teacher considers the immersion to be a better L2 learning tool for the student and therefore attempts a creation of a learning environment where the L1 is extremely minimally used or completely prohibited, with the anticipation that the learner will, with little to no option, use more L2. In fact, Atkinson (1987) has argued for another method called Post-communicative Approach where the L1 will be valued, positioned and given a significant space in second language pedagogy. The foregoing gives some clearer perspectives on how the L1 and its status or use in the second language classroom has evolved and developed over the period.

### *2.1. Language Policy in Ghana*

This study's import can be more appreciated in the appropriate national language policy context. Hence, some understanding of the current language policy in Ghana, especially regarding language of instruction in the classroom, is attempted. The language policy of Ghana, just like the evolution of L1 in ESL pedagogy as discussed above, has been inconsistent. Basically, the language policy of Ghana around the pre-colonial into the post-colonial periods has

maintained that both English and the indigenous languages be studied in schools (Fenyi, 2020). It is also clear that the local languages are to be introduced to the pupils when they are at the lower primary level. The only 'confusion', which has led to the several inconsistencies in the language policies, has been on the year or stage at which the pupils or schools have had to switch from the local language as medium of instruction to English (ibid). For example, in 2001, in a letter signed by the Director General of GES, teachers and school administrators were directed to use local languages as a medium of instruction in classes one to three and English be taught as a subject and then from the upper primary level, starting from class four upwards, English be used as a medium of instruction and the local language taught as a subject. Anyidoho (2018) quoted the instruction as succinctly as follows;

> *instruction at the Lower Primary Level (Primary 1 – 3) will be conducted in the pupil's mother tongue, or in the major Ghanaian Language of the local area, while English will be studied as one of the subjects offered at the Lower Primary Level. From Primary 4 onwards, class instruction will be conducted in English; and the Ghanaian Language will then be studied as one of the subjects offered (pg. 227).*

According to Anyidoho (ibid), the Director General of GES justified the policy by indicating that the pupils at the lower primary level would have an appreciable sense and affiliation with their culture when they are exposed to their own language at the very initial stages of their education. Again, it was intended for them to be literate in their mother or native language which was believed to be the bedrock for competence in the English language which they would later be introduced to since they could easily apply some of the rules of the local language to the second language.

However, in May 2002, another directive, which was a revision of the existing language policy, was put across by the Director General. In this new directive, three issues were clear.

a) The use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction at the lower primary level was to be quashed and replaced with the English Language.
b) The mother tongue should be studied as a subject right from the lower primary level to the senior secondary school level. At the primary to junior secondary school level it was compulsory and at the secondary level, it was optional.

But, in 2004, this policy was modified. With the new policy, both the English Language and the pupil's mother tongue was to be used as the medium of instruction in the classroom and both be taught as subjects as well (Anyidoho, 2018). The policy was also clear in indicating that in cases of a relatively high homogenous classroom, that is, classroom where the pupils, teachers and resources have similar linguistic backgrounds or composition, the language of instruction should be the child's mother tongue.

Andoh-Kumih (2017) has argued that even though officially, English is the accepted national language used for commerce, government businesses, media and education, at least from the upper primary school level to the tertiary level, some local languages have also been codified for national use. He enumerates the following local languages as having been made standard for some national assignments and for study at the lower primary school level, that is, from kindergarten to class three; Ga, Akan, Ewe, Dagaare/Waale, Nzema, Gonja, Dangbe, Kasem and Dagbane.

It can be realised from the discussions above that the sense of inconsistency and the lack of continuity in the language policy of the country's education system is very realistic. The current language policy design is such that L1 be used as the language of instruction at the Lower Primary school level and English be used as the language of instruction from Upper Primary (Class 4) to the tertiary level. This study contextualises this policy into the real classroom situation and examines the position and views of language tutors and students about the feasibility and productivity of this policy, at the tertiary level, specifically, Colleges of Education.

### *2.2. Literature Review*

Owing to the longstanding arguments and double stands on the use and usefulness of the L1 in the L2 classroom, quite a number of research works have been conducted to examine, investigate, confirm, deny or understand the L1's use in L2 pedagogy (Duff & Polio, 1990; Polio & Duff, 1994; Macaro, 2001; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002; Mpras, 2003; Edstrom, 2006; Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Besides exploring the extent to which the L1 is used in the second language classroom, these studies have also sought to examine the perceptions and attitudes of students and language instructors with respects to the role (s) that the L1 plays in diverse language contexts (Macaro, 2001; Mpras, 2003). These studies have generally posited that most of the L2 instructors really, to a certain degree, make use of the L1 even though they (the instructors) acknowledge that solely using the L2 in the L2 classroom remains the ideal situation (e.g., Duff & Polio, 1990; Macaro, 1995; Schweers, 1999; Mpras, 2003; Levine, 2003).

The fact that the use of the native language in the field of L2 or English language teaching and learning has received mixed reactions and been a controvertible subject among language scholars is no longer disputable (Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Even though L1 use in the L2 classroom is gaining some currency and appreciation among L2 scholars, they have been undivided in their argument that the L1 should have an insignificantly limited space and use during L2 teaching and learning. The proponents of the monolingual L2 classroom, that is, those who firmly hold the belief that L1 should not be used in the L2 classroom, in their attempt to support their assertions, raise quite a number of positions. One of such positions is that, when the L2 instructor floods the L2 pedagogy with the L1, it could have some detrimental effects on the tutor's competence and use of the L2 such that his amount of comprehensible or intelligible L2 input gets decreased, a thing assumed to fetter the students' learning of the L2. Their argument remains that the adults', such as tertiary students', learning of the L2 should ideally happen in the same fashion as a child's learning of the L1 with a focus on 'unconsciously acquiring' the language rather than 'consciously learning' it (Mitchell, 1988, as cited in Chambers, 1991).

These positions and arguments in support of the monolingual L2 classroom could stem from the long standing dogmatic views relative to the naturalistic approaches to the teaching and learning of language which emphasises that the L2 learner be 'immersed' in the L2 with sufficient exposure opportunities in the target language, for example, Krashen and Terrel (1983). Consequently, these monolingual defendants view the usage of the L1 in the L2 classroom, as typical of the timeworn grammar translation method that generally concentrated on translating from the target language to the L1 as a means by which the L2 is learnt, as a nonstarter and would not give any allowance for such phenomenon in L2 pedagogy (Polio & Duff, 1994; Campa & Nassaji, 2009). In other words, those who have challenged the use of the L1 are of the conviction that the teaching of the L2 should be done completely devoid of any interference, interruptions and references from the L1. Also, it is their belief that when an L2 instructor makes use of the L1, it is an indication that he is insufficiently trained in the L2 and therefore succumbing to pressure from colleagues and students not to always make use of the L2 (Harbord, 1992). Therefore, the arguments for an L2-only English classroom consider it (the L2) as the only means by which second language could be effectively taught and hence "no use of L1" is an undisputed proposition (Franklin, 1990; Chambers, 1991).

There are other language researchers and scholars who, in contravention, firmly argue and believe that the L1 should not be completely abandoned in the second language classroom. In order to defend their position, they provide both sociolinguistic and cognitive reasons. With respect to the cognitive perspective, they argue that the students, in their bid to learning the second language, fall on their knowledge on the rules in the first language (Campa & Nassaji, 2009). This is due to the universality of language such that all languages share some common features and therefore if one is able to master his L1, he is able to transfer some of these rules to the L2, making for an effective learning of the latter (van Lier, 1995; Butzkamm, 1998; Cook, 2001). Therefore, the L1 becomes a very valuable cognitive reference material for the L2 (Hinkel, 1980; Artemeva, 1995). It is assumed therefore that when the L1 is banned from the second language classroom, it indicts the cognitive reality where relating new concepts (of the L2) to pre-existing knowledge (of the L1) affords better and greater chances at learning the language. Moreover, the L1 could be a socio-cognitive tool with which the learning of the L2 could be mediated and interaction among the students in the L2 environment could be promoted (Wells, 1998; Anton & DiCamilla, 1999; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Thoms, Liao, & Szustak, 2005). Furthermore, when the learners use the L1, it is a sociolinguistic indication of their

developing bilingual status which bridges their new identity created in the L2 with their old identity in the L1 (Chavez, 2003; Belz, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004).

In their study on the use of the L1 in the L2 lessons administered at the California University, Duff and Polio (1990) and Polio and Duff (1994) asserted that the amount of L1 that was used during the teaching and learning of the L2 lessons ranged from 0% to 90%. They also gathered from the L2 instructors that they (the latter) had various reasons for using the L1. Some of these reasons are administrative, classroom management and teaching of grammar. Tang (2002) in a similar study in some selected Chinese universities found out that common among the various reasons for which an L2 instructor uses the L1 is to explain culturally specific concepts, explain abstract concepts and then to give activity instructions. Kaneko (1992) also attempted at understanding the amount and reasons for which an L2 instructor would want to use the L1 in an ESL context in some secondary schools in Japan. He identified that the L2 learners and instructors use 52% to 75% L1 in their lessons at the senior high school level and 63% to 85% at the junior high school level. And, some of the reasons that came out were, to manage the class/lesson, to build affinity, rapport and identify with the learners, and give or explain activity instructions.

Also, while Macaro (2002), in his case study research on French tutors with teenage students in some high schools in southern England, found out that the amount of L1 used in the L2 classroom was insignificant ranging from 0% to 16%, Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002), in their case study work on five ESL courses at some universities in Australia on the amount of use of the L1, realised an average of 9% L1 use. An amount they concluded as insignificant. These earlier studies converge in their appreciation that the context of teaching, to a very large extent, influences and determines the (amount) of L1 use in the second language classroom. Even though all these studies have looked at L1 use in the L2 context, it is yet to be established the Ghanaian College of Education tutors and students' attitude and perception on the occasions and reasons for using the L1 during L2 lessons. This study therefore focuses on investigating this important gap left in research. It examined how the L1 is used during L2 teaching and learning in a context with a national language policy that forbids the use of L1 as a language of instruction.

## 3. Method and Design

The study employed the qualitative research design in order to appreciate, understand and explore the points of views and the various reasons for which language students and tutors would want to use the L1 in the English classroom. The adoption of the qualitative design is in sync with Richards' (2003) assertion that, it aims at understanding the significance and meanings of actions from the points of view or perspectives of those who are involved. In the case of this study, the researchers wanted to find out the point of view of the students and the tutors, who are involved in the teaching and learning of L2 and the rationale behind their actions. Again, qualitative method was adopted for this study because data were collected from the natural classroom settings after which interpretations, in terms of the perspectives of the students and tutors, were put to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The study, which thematised the data in order to afford some in-depth analysis, also adopted Ryle's (1949) (cited in Denzin, 2000) Thick Description approach to analysing the data. Denzin (2000) insinuates that the thick description approach provides the context within which an experience takes place, elaborates the meanings and intentions with which the experience was organised and talks about the experience generally as a process.

Going by this qualitative thick description approach, the researchers were able to interpret the data to expose and reflect, maximally, the perspectives of the language tutors and students on their use of the L1 in the classroom. It must be emphasised that, in this study, the researchers explored two social groups (students and tutors) in a shared context where the researchers themselves belonged in the social group of tutors. Therefore, the researchers, in their collection and analysis of the data, bring to bear another important paradigm of qualitative study known by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2006) as Insider Perspective. With insider perspective, the conductors of a study are first hand experiencers of the events in the data collection process. Even though they do not impose their experiences on the interpretation of the collected data, such background turns out to be a significant resource and reference tool for a more rigorous analysis of the data (Mora Pablo, Lengeling, Buenaventura, Crawford & Goodwin, 2011). The next sessions talk about the participants of the study, the techniques for data collection and the process of data analysis.

Through purposive sampling, the participants of the study were selected. Purposive sampling was adopted against Maxwell's (1998) argument that it is a sampling type where particular persons, settings or events are selected

calculatingly or intentionally so that they provide some important information which may not be sufficiently gotten from other sources or choices. The number of participants comprised 13 language tutors from four Colleges of Education in the Cent/West zone and 57 second-year language specialism trainees in the same zone. Even though the tutors had linguistically heterogeneous L1 backgrounds, they all affirmed that they could speak and write fluently in Fante/Twi, the two predominantly mutually intelligible native languages in Ghana. Thus, Fante/Twi were considered to be the L1 for the study. The students had the same linguistic situation as the tutors but, with them, their linguistic backgrounds could not alter or influence the data collection process since they needed to be able to speak the tutors' L1 if they could use any L1 in the ESL classroom. Point is, it was the tutors L1 that determined which L1 could be used in the L2 classroom (Bhooth et al, 2014). And actually, all the student participants, unsurprisingly, were equally fluent in Fante/Twi. Again, the tutors and the students shared very similar respective English language (L2) backgrounds. Each tutor had taught Language-related courses consistently for at least two years at the college level and had a BA, MA/M.Ed./MPhil qualification in English, Fante or French. With the students, all had had their primary and secondary education in Ghana and were all in their second year at the tertiary. Also, all were specialising in one language or the other. Therefore, they were considered to have shared the same/similar language backgrounds hence were viable for the study. The research objectives were explained to the participants and they were accorded the opportunity to take part or decline, at any point they deemed expedient in the research process. They asked for and were assured of confidentiality of information and protection of their identity hence, pseudonyms were used instead of the real names and places of work/school.

The data collection instruments used for the study were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participant observation was used because all the researchers are language tutors at the College of Education and therefore their observation and personal experience and use of the L1 in their language class sessions became useful pool for data (Bhooth et al, 2014). Also, the researchers spent time to visit, sit in and observe class sessions of the participant tutors. They then recorded, by way of note taking, all the occasions where the tutors or students employed the L1. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with all the 13 tutors and 70% of the 57 students. The interviews were meant to give the researchers an opportunity to get into the 'minds' of the participants and hear, from the horses' own mouth, their reasons, justifications and explanations for the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom in a country where the national language policy do not support such action in official settings like the school. The interviews, each which lasted 20-25 minutes approximately, were meant to guide the conversation or dialogue between the researchers and the participants and at the same time flexible enough to evolve depending on the responses from the interviewees. Relevant portions of these audio-recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis to ascertain common practices. The data were collected in the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic year.

The analysis of the data was done through the following procedure:

(1) The data were taken from the tutors and students and coded.
(2) Relevant portions of the interviews were transcribed and analysed.
(3) All the three researchers met as a group, thoroughly read and discussed the gathered data dispassionately for general understanding and interpretation.
(4) The data were then put into three groups with each researcher handed a group to individually analyse, with a background of what was generally discussed.
(5) Each researcher's core task was to analyse the data such that common emerging themes could be identified.
(6) Then finally, the researchers met together again as a team to discuss and identify the final common emerging themes. These final emerging themes have been presented and discussed in the next session.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### *4.1. Results*

From the analysis of the data, six common themes emerged as the reasons and occasions in which tutors and students make use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. Many of these themes sit in congruence with some of the findings of earlier studies such as Lewis (1993), Polio and Duff (1994), Reinke, Lewis-Palmer & Merrell (2008), Edstrom (2006), Rolin-

Ianziti and Varshney (2008) and Mora Pablo et al (2011). Different tutors and students have different reasons and occasions for their use of the L1. It must be appreciated that the emerging themes elaborated in the sessions below have come out predominantly upon the tutors and students assumption that no one method or reason is suitable for all teaching and learning situations and environments (Reinke et al, 2008).

*4.1.1. Empathy/Solidarity*

Teaching and learning are arts. Many ingredients go into the making of a good teaching and learning activity which results in absolute understanding and knowledge acquisition. One of such 'silent' but important element in the teaching and learning process is the ability of the tutor to empathise, solidarise and build good rapport with the students and vice versa (Edstrom, 2006). And for many of them, one of the ways to achieve that is to speak the native language of the students. To them, once a tutor is able to 'connect' with the student on the level of language, teaching and learning becomes easy, simple and the classroom environment becomes very conducive and friendly. As could be observed in the TI below, the tutor explains the occasion when he makes use of the L1

1. *I normally use the L1 mostly in my first time meetings with my students. In most of the first time lessons, the students feel tensed up and try to figure out who the tutor is, what he (dis) likes, etc. Therefore I use the L1 to give them a gist of where I come from and quickly, they connect with me, especially those who come from same/similar linguistic backgrounds*

Another tutor also indicates a 'solidarity' reason for her use of the L1. For her, the use of the L1 helps to send across a message to the students that they are not in a situation alone, especially when the topic or subject poses great challenge and discomfort to the students probably due to its level of difficulty or unfamiliarity. She indicated

2. *I normally use the Twi in my English lessons when I realise that the topic is unfamiliar to my students. The expressions on their faces, the general mood in the class and sometimes the type of questions they ask in the class give me a hint on how complex the topic is to them and in order to help them feel that they are not in the situation alone, I turn to the L1. By this, they feel my company, presence and association. They feel like, "oh, so madam is one of us and understands how we feel"*

It is not only the tutors who use the L1 as a tool for solidarity or empathy, the students also use the L1 for same purpose. When the students realise that their tutor is finding some difficulty breaking down a rather complex concept to them in the second language, they intentionally ask questions, interact and use the L1 in order for their tutor to feel that they are there for/with him/her. Extracts 3 and 4 below explains the students' position on the solidarity use of the L1.

3. *For me, anytime I realise that our tutor is trying all his best to explain a complex concept to us, and I realise that he is really struggling to do so, I interact with him in the L1. Most of the times, I see some sigh of relief on his face, a sign that, at least, we are strongly behind him and that he is not alone in the 'mess'.*

4. *The first time I used the L1 in our English class, it was because I wanted our English tutor to feel my support. Just when he was about to enter the class, his shirt got stuck to a nail and got torn. That was very embarrassing. Therefore, I used the L1 to interact with him. This made him feel not left alone.*

It is important to understand that empathy and solidarity are, although not direct teaching and learning tools, equally important in the whole complex cycle of teaching and learning which aids in the overall understanding process (Edstrom, 2006; Polio and Duff, 1994). They may not be tools that a tutor or student would directly want to employ in the classroom, but they are important tools which create some 'social connection' in the rather formal classroom and breaks the 'formal barrier' between the two social groups. This helps to smoothen the teaching and learning process because they students feel like they are learning or being taught by a 'friend' and therefore actively participate in the class.

*4.1.2. Classroom Management*

Teaching and learning is not only about a teacher standing in front of students to deliver a lesson on a given topic. It is equally about the teacher's ability to steer the affairs, 'control' or manage the class. Stichter, Lewis, Whittaker, Richter, Johnson, and Trussell (2006) have asserted that when the classroom is not managed well, it gives room for students to make noise, disturb, distract and verbally interrupt the teaching and learning process. This, to them, does not make teaching and learning successful hence the objectives of teaching is hardly achieved. Classroom management is a set of techniques, procedures or skills, which when employed and followed in the classroom, aids the tutor in maintaining orderliness and smoothens the teaching and learning process such that the overall aims and objectives get achieved, that is, teacher is able to complete his set task within the set time/duration and the student is able to understand all that they must (Malone and Tietjens, 2000; Vitaro, Brendgen, Larose and Tremblay, 2005; Tal, 2010; Little & Akin-Little, 2008; Hughes, 2014). And, language plays an important role in carrying out instruction and managing the class. It was revealed, during the interview and observation sessions of this study that, the ESL class was dotted with the L1 on occasions where the tutor had to 'control' the excesses of the learners. In the extracts below, the tutors indicated the classroom management occasions which they employed the L1.

5. *I normally use the L1 when I'm instructing the students to do a thing and want them to 'feel' the seriousness of the instruction. When you instruct or order them in a language they are born with, they tend to obey.*

6. *In my English class, I occasionally use the L1 when I want to give an instruction fluently. You know, English is not my native language and so I stammer, slip or make mistakes when I want to talk in a rather harsh or quick manner. I therefore resort to the L1 which I have 100% fluency, accuracy and control over.*

The students, who cannot or find it difficult to 'instruct' their teacher, play quite a minimal role in classroom management and instruction. Mostly, they are 'victims' or recipients of instruction (Hughes, 2014). However, on occasions where they have had to respond to instruction, they have used the L1.

7. *When our tutors tell us to keep quiet or be organised, we sometimes respond in the L1, especially on occasions when the teacher is angry and we want him to calm down, tone down or have 'mercy' on us.*

*4.1.3. Lack of Comprehension/Translation*

Excerpts 8 to 12 below are comments from the respondents on the use of L1 in the teaching of unknown vocabulary or concepts. In this study, unknown vocabulary refers to words, expressions or concepts that are not familiar with the students (Stichter et al, 2006). These are words that the students do not understand and would need some further explanations in relevant contexts before they gain understanding. The tutors, as evidenced in the comments below, in an attempt at creating the relevant context to explain unfamiliar concepts, employ the L1, its culture and setting.

8. *…I adopt the L1 in my ESL class when the concept I'm explaining appears too abstract or strange to my students…*

9. *…most of the times when I have used the L1 in my class, it has been because there was the need to contextualise an unfamiliar theme or idea to the students. When I am strict on using English to explain everything, they (the students) tend to be confused.*
10. *…the L1 helps me to break down complicated and foreign vocabularies or expressions to my student. It is not easy to understand words that are not familiar to our culture and contexts and therefore as a language teacher, I try to use some elements in our context to explain some of these foreign concepts…*
11. *…in situations where key words have posed challenges to my students, I have depended solely on the L1 to help me simplify such key words…*
12. *…I remember this occasion where I had to explain and differentiate between "enskinment" and "enstoolment". I quickly resorted to the L1, used the Northern and Ashanti culture and contexts to explain these two concepts. My students understood them very well and they were happy.*

From the comments above, one theme runs common through them- the need to use the L1, its culture and context, to explain vocabularies or key words. This 'function' of the L1 in the L2 classroom was recounted in Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) and have been part of the reasons for which some language scholars think it expedient to allow a considerable amount of L1 use in ESL pedagogy.

*4.1.4. Students' Prompts*

Reports from the observations of the ESL class sessions revealed that, on some occasions, tutors adopted the L1 because the students demanded for it and the tutors obliged, based on the notion that, in the classroom, the student must be seen as a client whose needs must be met or satisfied. The general notion is that a teacher's core duty is to serve the students by imparting knowledge to them (Hughes, 2014). Therefore, the needs of the learners must be held in high esteem. Tutors who believe in this school of thought therefore consider it obligatory to please them (the students) when they make genuine and legitimate requests on how the lesson should be taught. The extracts below are recorded tutor-student conversations in the class

13. *Tutor: …yes, the -ing participle nominal clause begins with a verb that ends in –ing*
    *Student: But sir, how then can one differentiate between the –ing nominal and contracted relative clause*
    *Tutor: It's quite easy, when the structures are similar, just use their functions to differentiate*
    *Student: Sir, this one dɛɛ, I don't understand oo…unless you use Twi to explain.*
    *Tutor: Don't worry, I'm here for you.*

14. *Student 1: Sir, I think we'll better understand if you break it down with Twi for us. We are finding it difficult to understand the English.*
    *Tutor: Are you speaking for yourself or the entire class? Many already understand…*
    *Student 2: Sir, she is speaking for all of us. We don't understand what you're saying. We are sure the Twi will help us*
    *Tutor: (asking the class) Do you want Twi?*
    *Students: (chorus) Yes!*
    *Tutor: Alright, then…*

Extracts 13 and 14 reveal how, on the prompts and requests of the students, the tutors have had to introduce the L1 in the L2 class. It could be observed from the discourses above that the students request for L1 when the topics under discussion were difficult for them to grasp. This indicates that the L1 is the reference linguistic material resorted to anytime there is difficulty. It is on this premise that Hinkel (1980) and Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain (2004) have argued for a reasonable use of the L1 in ESL pedagogy. To them, the L1 is the only go-to tool that can effectively help to ease down the difficulty of an English concept, therefore it was not surprising that the students found some refuge in it. Again, the tutors' compliance with the linguistic demands of the learners is an indication how teaching and learning has developed and evolved around the learner. It is no longer about what the 'experts' or tutors feel and think should happen in the classroom but rather about building consensus with the students and arriving at a common platform that harnesses, the best means possible, effective teaching and learning (Machaal, 2012).

*4.1.5. Nurturing Bilingualism*

The average Ghanaian student, at least, at the tertiary level, is bilingual. He is able to read and write fairly well in both the English language and the L1, and probably other languages s/he is exposed to. This is because the language of instruction in Ghanaian schools is English and therefore the consistent exposure of a Ghanaian student to English from the primary level to the tertiary would naturally enable him to read, understand and write in same. The child is also able to at least speak, understand and interact in the L1, hence becomes bilingual. The argument therefore is that, if the child is 'immersed' in the English, such that very limited exposure in the L1 is given him, he might lose the mother tongue and rather become a monolingual in English, which is the case in most rich homes (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Auerbach, 1993; Monzo, & Rueda, 2009). Therefore, some of the ESL tutors intentionally employ the L1 in the ESL classroom so that they can nurture the bilingual inclination of the students. Some of the responses of the participants, as shown in excerpts 15 to 18, speak to the bilingualism argument.

15. *…I realised that some of my students could speak only English. They had lost their L1. And so, I intentionally introduce the L1 in my L2 lessons so that the students are forced to use the L1. By so doing, they are gradually developing the L1 back…*

16. *My belief is that, it is better, as a human, to be able to speak in at least two languages or even more. It is this orientation that urges me to use the L1 in my class. Therefore, my class is always bilingual in nature. I don't want my students to be fluent in only English…*

17. *…I never knew that some of my students were monolinguals in English. Some of them even feel shy to speak the L1 because they feel it's inferior or feel speaking it is a mark of incompetence in English. I have made it a decision to use at least 10% L1 in my class to help the students develop the L1 alongside the L2…*

18. *…imagine that all English teachers, from Primary to the tertiary, decide to restrict their class to English use. I bet you our children would have lost their L1 long ago. It good for them to become bilinguals. Allow us to use the L1 with the L2…*

It could be observed from the comments above that using the L1 in the ESL class has been an intentional decision of some tutors to groom or help the students (re) develop their L1 speaking skills. It is their belief that when the L1 is used, together with the L2, the students will see the need to use the former and in fact, see it as equally important. It is indeed the case that some students feel inferior using the L1 and therefore would not want to use it. When such students see their teachers use it, and above all, in the L2 class, as if to say the L1 is as important as the L2, they would be encouraged to use it too. By so doing, these students would become bilinguals- fluent in both the L1 and the L2. This belief and practices of the English tutors in the Colleges are in league with the assertion of the many language scholars who reason that bilingualism or multilingualism is more ideal than monolingualism and have criticised the awful manner in which people have lost their L1 due to the 'immersion' in the L2 (Baker, 2001; Gonzalez, 2001).

*4.1.6. Identity*

It is no longer a disputed fact that language is culture and culture is identity (Bakhtin, 1981). A people's culture depicts their beliefs, values, actions, aspirations, and general way of life or totality of their being. It does not only comprise the external aspects of their lives, such as the clothing they put on, the food they cherish, what they celebrate and how they do it, but also, it includes the intangible aspects of their lives such as superstitious or religious philosophies, their language and its nature, among other shared values which form, shape and inform the way they behave, think and perceive the world (Nieto, 2010). Therefore, the identity of any group of people is embedded in their culture, which is shown in the language they speak and the manner they speak (Monzo & Rueda, 2009). It is important for all teachers to understand the relationship between culture, identity and language especially for teachers who handle heterogeneous class settings, as it is mostly the case in Ghana (Mercuri, 2012). The respondents, both tutors and students, indicated that, they occasionally use the L1 in order to connect and identify with their culture and also, identify with colleagues who share in the same or similar cultural background. Excerpts 19 to 22 below give a clear picture of the cultural identity role and reason for the use of the L1.

19. *…for me, the L1 is a very important tool for cultural identity. Sometimes, in order to let my tutor know my cultural background, I use the L1 in interacting and responding to questions. When he gets to know, he is then able to understand me better and this shapes the way he teaches…*

20. *…I remember that there was a day my tutor wanted someone to describe how the Bakatue festival is celebrated in Elmina. Because I have been speaking the L1 in class, he called me straightaway to lead the discussion. I think he was able to identify me with Elmina and the Bakatue festival because of my L1…*

21. *…Initially, most of my students thought I was British or at least schooled in Britain because of my intonation and fair skin complexion. It was my L1 that helped them to make me out as a Tardi lady (lady from Takoradi). So, I will say that, the L1 is very important when it comes to cultural identity…*

22. *It is important as tutor to know and understand the various cultural backgrounds of my students. This helps to know how I should treat them in class. People sometimes have cultural reasons for doing what they do and therefore, a better understanding of where they come from indeed shapes my reaction towards them. And, the L1 serves as a very important tool in the area of cultural identity.*

In league with the earlier studies such as *Bakhtin* (1981), Stronge, Ward, Tucker & Hindeman, (2007), Monzo and Rueda (2009) and Mercuri (2012) that have established the interrelationship between culture, language and identity, the comments from the respondents as evidenced in the box above clearly depict and give credence to how both tutors and students have used the L1 to determine the cultural backgrounds of either. The tutors admitted that their knowledge on the culture of their students have indeed had some influence on the strategies, techniques and methods of teaching. On some occasions, they have used the students as resource persons to discuss the issues of culture. The students, on the other hand, have also had the manner they react and respond to their tutors shaped and influenced by their knowledge on the cultural backgrounds of their tutors. These underscore the importance of the L1 in the L2 classroom

### *4.2. Discussion of Result and Its Impacts on Teaching*

The data gathered and presented in the *result* session above have revealed very important roles and occasions in which there have been the need by, either the tutor or student, to introduce and use the L1 in the language classroom. The assertions by earlier similar works on the L1 in L2 classroom that the relevance of the L1 in the teaching and learning of the L2 should not be a case for debate in any credible scholarly linguistic study is upheld in this current study where, almost inevitably, all the observed ESL sessions and interviewed participants support the claim that the L1 must be used in the L2 classroom (Atkinson, 1987; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Tang, 2002; Nation, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Sharma, 2006; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Salah & Farrah 2012; Machaal, 2012; Bhootha, Azmanb & Kemboja, 2014). The arguments in support of the use of the L1 is not made in isolation, some reasons have been mounted in support of same. In this study, six reasons have been revealed in the data.

Firstly, empathy/solidarity has been posited as reason for the use of the L1. It is argued that teaching and learning can be very successful with the objectives of learning duly achieved when there is reasonable tutor-student emotional connection (Edstrom, 2006). When each other understand the emotional needs of themselves, the classroom environment is rendered very friendly and conducive for teaching and learning to take place. This emotional connection can be realised, as revealed in the data, at the level of language use. Tutors who meet their students, especially for the first time, tend to rely on the L1 to reduce, if not eliminate, the natural anxiety, suspense, tense or curiosity that naturally characterises first time meetings and impressions. It was also established that students turn into active participants in the classroom when they have a good rapport with the tutor. These elements- empathy, solidarity, rapport- are very important, though ‘silent’, in the teaching and learning process, and the L1 presents a very dependable platform or medium for them (Al-Nofaie, 2010).

Secondly, the L1 is used for classroom management. Class management looks at the set of techniques or skills employed and adopted by the tutor to ensure some orderliness and sanity in the class such that the aims and objectives of the teaching and learning process are achieved (Nation, 1997; Wells, 1998; Malone and Tietjens, 2000; Vitaro et al, 2005; Little & Akin-Little, 2008). It is the ability of the tutor to direct, control or steer the affairs of the class (Sticher et al, 2006). Beyond the art of teaching, it lies with the remit of the tutor to ‘control’ the students and their excesses or

disturbances while class is in progress. The data reveals that language, especially the L1, plays very important role in managing the class. The students understand the 'soul' of the L1 when a tutor uses it to instruct them and therefore comply (Chavez, 2003). The students, on the other hand, rely on the L1 to 'tame' the excesses of their tutors as well when they realise that the tutor has become extremely angry and want to plead for 'mercy'.

Thirdly, the L1 is used when there is lack of comprehension or difficulty on the part of the students to grasp a concept which is explained or taught in English. Sometimes, the difficulty arises due to the lack of appropriate context to situate same. The tutors therefore use the L1 to create relevant contexts to explain key concepts and issues to the students. Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) assert that, in the event where students find it difficult to understand a given concept, it is important to explain to them in a language they will, with less difficulty and effort, understand. The data reveal the validity of this assertion where teachers have depended on the L1 to explain unfamiliar topics and themes to the students. And, the students themselves claimed that they feel relieved anytime the L1 is used in the ESL class.

Another occasion or reason where tutors have initiated L1 use in the L2 classroom is when the students themselves have demanded, requested or prompted for its use. In the classroom setting, the tutor is there to 'serve' the needs of the students (Levine, 2003). Therefore, the wish, needs and demands of the students are regarded in very high esteem. Tutors, who see themselves as being there on the whims of the students, respect and respond to their requests. It is on this premise which, when the students request for L1 use, they are granted. Extracts 8 and 9, which presented recorded observations of class sessions, reveal that, there were instances where the students had directly asked their tutors to explain confusing concepts in the L1 for easy understanding. It is on such background that Artemeva (1995) and Butzkamm (1998) have argued for some considerable adoption of the L1 in ESL pedagogy. To them, the L1 remains the only go-to linguistic tool which can aid to break down difficult English concepts, it was therefore not surprising that the students found some refuge in it.

Fifthly, some tutors have intentionally used the L1 in order to nurture their bilingual proclivity and that of their students. The general hypothesis is that when one is 'immersed' in the second Language, they tend to develop expertise in it, to the detriment of the L1 (Auerbach, 1993; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004; Bouangeune 2009). Therefore, the fear of becoming monolinguals in English, spur them on to occasionally but regularly use the L1 just to keep in touch with the latter. Using both the L1 and the L2 together, creates in the students, the impression that both languages are equally important and must be seen and treated in that light. This practice of nurturing bilingualism or even multilingualism leans towards the scholarly arguments as posited by Baker (2001) and Gonzalez (2001) that it is more ideal to be a bilingual or even a multilingual than to be a monolingual.

Lastly, the need to maintain ones cultural identity also motivates the use of the L1 in the ESL classroom. Language is an important aspect of culture (*Monzo & Rueda, 2009*). Hence, any attempt to 'defend' or project ones culture cannot be complete without projecting the native language. In the ESl class, the tutor-student discourses have aimed at, among other things, establishing the connection between language, culture and identity. And, this can only be achieved with the L1, at least, than the L2. Education, in its holisticness, does not intend to subsume ones culture and identity into another's. However, the typical ESL classroom appears to project the English and their culture, as embedded in the language, over the culture, identity and language of the tutors and the students (Mercuri, 2012). Therefore, the tutor who is conscious about the diminishing effect on the consistent use of the L2 on the L1 makes every intentional attempt to balance the two such that neither imposes its identity over the other.

The data reveal that ESL tutors and students use the L1 in the L2 classroom, almost as a natural phenomenon. The implication of these findings is that language policy makers and tutors should not proscribe the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. The data reveal that the students sometimes lack the vocabulary or its understanding and are not able to express their thoughts clearly, confidently and accurately, hence, they depend on the L1. Even though tutors must strongly encourage an English-only ESL classroom, they could also consider the L1 as a pedagogical tool to be resorted anytime a justifiable need be.

## 5. Limitations and Recommendations

Upton (1997) holds the view that, it is natural for a bilingual or multilingual to frequently shift languages while speaking. It was therefore not surprising to find, in the ESL classroom, the occasional shifts between the L1 and the L2. He further opines that some shifts are intentional while others are unintentional depending on the context and need. This study however limited itself to the intentional alternation between the L1 and the L2 in the ESL classroom. It is therefore recommended that any further study would want to delve into the unintentional shifts in languages. Such study would likely realise data and findings that are more natural. Some earlier studies have also argued that L1/L2 alternation in the ESL classroom is more dominant at the lower levels of education than the higher levels (Wells, 1998; Anton & DiCamilla, 1999; Chavez, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004; Thoms, Liao, & Szustak, 2005). This study limited itself to the higher level (tertiary), a comparative study of L1/L2 use at the higher and lower levels of the ESL classroom is therefore recommended. Such study would be more revealing, robust and informative.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has attempted some investigation, analysis and understanding of the use of the L1 in the ESL classroom at the tertiary level in Ghana, specifically, the College of Education. Although, the study would shudder to claim absolute conclusiveness to the longstanding scholarly controversy over whether or not to use the L1 in the L2 classroom, it has made some reasonable attempt at finding out a. If the L1 usage is a regular practice, especially in a country where the national language policy forbids that, and b. The 'whys' for L1 use, from the perspectives of the tutors and students. Upon the results, discussion and analysis of the data, the study can fairly conclude on these four notes:

1. The L1 is conveniently used in the ESL classroom in Ghana, at least, at the tertiary level.
2. A complete proscription of the L1 use in the L2 classroom is practically impossible. In order words, the teaching and learning of the second language cannot be a strict monolingual event (Upton, 1997).
3. Using the L1 in the ESL classroom is more ideal than its prohibition. It is argued that there is no single 'best method' in teaching, and that, different methods, strategies and techniques are needed to make teaching successful (Lewis, 1993). Removing the L1 kills initiative, imagination and creativity of both tutors and students.
4. Tutors and students think the government should officially 'allow' such 'natural' practice of language shifts in the classroom. "After all, if the overall aim of teaching is to get learners to 'understand', and if shifting languages can help achieve this aim, then why can't it be allowed? That blatantly defeats the purpose of education", a tutor remarked.

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