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# First Language Use in EFL Teaching in Sweden

Teachers' Use of and Beliefs about Language of  
Instruction

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## Abstract

In the Swedish syllabus for English at the upper secondary level, it is explicitly mentioned that “English should as far as possible be conducted in English” (Skolverket, p. 1, 2011). The quote shows to which extent the ‘monolingual principle’ has influenced language teaching, which is reflected in the prevailing communicative language teaching methods used in most of today’s Swedish EFL classrooms. The issue of language of instruction is an important aspect of EFL teaching to further investigate, since it may have an impact on students’ TL development. The aim of this study is to investigate four teachers’ use of and beliefs about Swedish in EFL teaching at an upper secondary school in Sweden, by conducting observations and qualitative interviews. The study revealed that all teachers consider the L1 to have some positive effects on TL learning, especially with regards to grammar and vocabulary. Teachers do consequently to some extent make use of the L1, mostly through contrastive teaching. However, they conclude that judicious L1 use does not equal abandoning the TL, but it is rather about making maximal use of the TL and use the L1 in those circumstances in which it can enhance students’ TL development.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Some linguists claim that the first language (L1) has no role in effective foreign language (FL) teaching; thus, the focus within the classroom must be exclusively on the target language (TL). Since the classroom might be the only place for students to encounter the TL and practice communicating in it, it is important that the TL is maximized in the classroom (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; Nation, 2003; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Teachers might be students' primary source of TL input and must therefore function as a role model using the TL for all communicative needs that may arise in a classroom.

Other linguists claim that the L1 may function as a useful cognitive tool when learning a new language (Nation, 2003). Negotiating meaning using students' L1 is beneficial for learners with low TL proficiency, as TL production is facilitated by allowing students to initiate and sustain communication in the L1 (Brooks & Donato cited in Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). Another beneficial aspect of L1 use is that teachers can highlight similarities and differences between the languages (Cook, 2001; McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

Studies concerning teachers' beliefs about the language of instruction show that most teachers feel a bit uneasy about L1 use in the FL classroom (Paker & Karağaç, 2015), mainly because of the prevailing 'monolingual principle'. Studies also show that students' TL proficiency influences the amount and the way in which the L1 is used by teachers, as well as for which purposes.

A great deal of research has been carried out on advantages and disadvantages of L1 use in FL teaching, but less on teachers' beliefs about L1 use, especially in a Swedish EFL teaching context. Furthermore, with much of the research focusing on FL classrooms where teachers and students share the same L1, there is also a gap in research concerning teachers' beliefs about L1 use in a multilingual EFL classroom. Therefore, this study may prove valuable for learning more about Swedish teachers' beliefs about L1 use as well as being a starting-point for further discussions regarding L1 use in multilingual EFL classrooms.

The national syllabus is one of several steering documents that teachers must adhere to in their profession. In the most recent Swedish syllabus for English at the upper secondary

school (Lgy11) issued by The Swedish National Agency of Education<sup>1</sup>, it is explicitly mentioned that “Teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1), which is a shift from the previous syllabus (Lgy94) in which there was no explicit statement regarding language of instruction.

In 2011, The Swedish Schools Inspectorate<sup>2</sup> presented a report on the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Sweden in elementary school years 6-9, which highlighted the issue of the language of instruction. By observing 293 English lessons in 22 different schools around Sweden, the report revealed that even though many teachers create great opportunities for communicating in English during classroom time, many teachers also use Swedish to lesser or greater extent. “At almost half of the observed lessons, The Schools Inspectorate evaluated that activities which develop communicative abilities should have been more present to a higher extent”<sup>3</sup> (Skolinspektionen, 2011, p. 6), i.e. practical use of the TL. In summary, the observed lessons revealed that the amount of Swedish used differed greatly, from lessons with English only to lessons where neither teachers nor students spoke a word of English. Most common was, however, a mixture between the two languages.

The student survey, which was also a part of the report, indicated similar results, i.e. a great difference in the amount of Swedish used by teachers. According to students roughly 50 per cent of lessons are conducted in English only. Roughly 20 per cent of the students reported that their teacher used a large quantity of Swedish. Even though the report focuses on English teaching at the elementary school level, it is still relevant in the discussion of the language of instruction at the upper secondary school level. It highlights an issue that is visible at all educational levels, since TL use is promoted in the national syllabus at the upper secondary level as mentioned previously.

Keeping the results of the report in mind and the ongoing discussion among researchers about the ‘to be or not to be’ of the L1 in FL teaching, it is important for educators and educational institutions to be aware of the issue. Little is known about teachers’ beliefs about and use of the L1 in EFL teaching in Sweden. Therefore, it is of value to expand on that knowledge, especially since teachers are key figures in learners’ language learning process.

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<sup>1</sup> Skolverket

<sup>2</sup> Skolinspektionen

<sup>3</sup> Author’s translation of: ”Vid nära hälften av de observerade lektionerna bedömer dock Skolinspektionen att aktiviteter som utvecklar den kommunikativa förmågan borde ha funnits i större utsträckning”.

Many classes in Swedish schools today are linguistically heterogenous, as a cause of a more ethnically and linguistically heterogenous society (Skolverket, 2012). In elementary school, almost 20 per cent of students have another L1 than Swedish and there are as many as up to 150 different L1s spoken by students (ibid). This linguistic diversity is something that needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the matter of using the L1 in EFL teaching, since the term L1 is not one language, but rather many different languages. This specific study will mainly focus on the use of Swedish as an L1, even though it touches on the issue of how other L1s can be utilized in a multilingual classroom.

## 1.2 Aim

The aim of the study is to investigate four teachers' use of and beliefs about L1 use in EFL teaching at the upper secondary school in Sweden. The research questions used to investigate this are:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about the use of Swedish in EFL teaching?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about the use of any other L1s than Swedish in EFL teaching?
3. How, when and to what extent is Swedish used?

## 1.3 Definitions

Throughout the empirical study some terms will be used in their abbreviated forms, some of which have previously been mentioned. TL is the language that the students are supposed to learn through language teaching. Another term is L1, which in this study is considered the first language that a child acquires (Cook, 2008).

Krashen (1982) makes a distinction between the terms learning and acquisition. According to this distinction, acquisition is a subconscious language learning process, similar to a child learning their L1. Learning on the other hand is considered a conscious process, like teaching and learning a FL in a classroom (Andersson, 2015). In this study, the term learning will henceforth be used.

The study revolves around the educational setting of EFL teaching. EFL "is learned by people who already use at least one other language and who live in a community in which English is not normally used" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 137). The definition of the term implies

that in countries where English is taught as a FL, it does not constitute part of society. Instead, a FL is primarily learnt for communication outside one's own community (Littlewood, 1984). An EFL teaching context differs from a second language (L2) teaching context, mainly when it comes to the purpose of teaching as "a second language is for immediate use within the same country" (Cook, 2008, p. 11). It is consequently necessary for students to learn the TL to participate in and be part of the community in which they live in. Keeping the two different definitions in mind, researchers do however, often use these definitions interchangeably which may be noted in research. This study will henceforth use the term EFL when discussing the setting of teaching English in Sweden, as it is the appropriate term based on the language situation with Swedish being the official language.

## **2 Literature Review**

The use of the L1 in FL teaching is an issue which researchers have been discussing for many years and it remains a controversial issue up until today (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). The assumption that the L1 should be excluded from FL teaching is an assumption that has been accepted and internalized by most language teachers for more than 100 years (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007). It is referred to as the 'monolingual principle', which emphasizes the "instructional use of the target language to the exclusion of students' L1" (Cummins, 2007, p. 223). The principle promotes the ban of the L1 as it may be an impediment to TL development, since it deprives learners of valuable exposure to the TL. Hence, the TL has become the legitimate and dominant language of instruction in most FL classrooms (He, 2012).

### **2.1 Language learning theories in a historical context**

Some language learning theories ban the use of the L1 in FL teaching, whereas others advocate L1 use. Due to changes in popularity between language learning theories throughout history, the view on the applicability of L1 use in FL teaching has fluctuated.

During pre-twentieth-century, the Grammar translation method was one of the most prominent language teaching methods. It promotes a bilingual approach to language teaching, i.e. the L1 and the FL are inevitably linked and must hence be used extensively in teaching of the TL, mostly through translation (Shabir, 2017). The goal of the method is, however, not to

be able to communicate in the TL and “the result of this approach is usually an inability on the part of the student to use the language for communication” (Celce-Murcia, 2014, p. 5).

As the goal of FL teaching was modified, teaching methods were consequently also modified. “Bilingual teaching and grammar translation received heavy criticism and considered to have negative effects on the learning process” (Shabir, 2017, p. 45), mainly because the goal was instead to be able to communicate in the TL and hence monolingual approaches gained popularity. The underlying theoretical principle of the monolingual approach is that FL teaching should be based on the same principles as children’s L1 acquisition (Cook, 2001; Butzkamm, 2011; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Bhooth, Azman & Ismail, 2014). The Direct method, prominent during early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is based on this approach to FL teaching and therefore the method pushes for the sole use of TL during teaching as the goal is for students to understand the TL without any translation (Andersson, 2015).

Another monolingual approach to FL teaching is the Audio-lingual method, which evolved in the late 1940s. The method is based on a behaviourist view of language teaching, in which language learning is seen as a set of habits that needs to be built up piece by piece, e.g. by using imitation. L1 transfer is assigned a significant role in the language learning process since it is considered a bad habit. The method therefore makes use of contrastive analysis to discover the differences between the TL and the L1 so that they can be eliminated (Andersson, 2015).

During the 1970s and 80s, Krashen’s ‘comprehensible input hypothesis’ gained widespread recognition. As the name implies, the hypothesis highlights the importance of TL input. Krashen (1982) states that language can be acquired only when we are exposed to comprehensible input that is a little beyond our current level of competence, i.e.  $i + 1$ .

As opposed to a behaviourist perspective on language teaching, sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of interaction. The concept of ‘The Zone of Proximal Development’ is a well-known concept within this theory and it is “used to refer to the gap between the learner’s current stage and the next point on some developmental scale the learner is capable of reaching” (Cook, 2008, p. 228) with help from the teacher or peers. This process is referred to as scaffolding.

The communicative approach to language teaching is also in contrast to a behaviourist perspective. In this approach, teaching is based on TL communication “both as the target that the students need to achieve, and as the means of acquiring it in the classroom” (Cook, 2008, p. 247). The underlying assumption of the communicative approach is thus that “if the

development of communicative language ability is the goal of classroom learning, then communicative practice must be part of the process” (Hedge, 2000, p. 57). Through meaningful TL communication that requires negotiation, students are subjected to a more implicit TL learning (Andersson, 2015).

## 2.2 L1 use in FL teaching

Following section will briefly summarize different standpoints regarding L1 use in FL teaching.

### 2.2.1 Teachers’ beliefs about L1 use in FL teaching

The ‘monolingual principle’ has dominated FL classrooms for decades and has therefore affected the way in which many teachers feel about L1 use. “Most teachers are uneasy about the use of mother tongue in the classes and cannot decide whether it is a good idea to use it or not, or if it is going to be used, when, why and for what purposes” (Paker & Karaağaç, 2015, p. 2). Another factor which to some extent may have affected teachers’ beliefs about the language of instruction is that of “the widespread adoption of communicative approaches to language teaching in which classroom activities are designed to maximize learners’ use of the target language” (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003, p. 760). However, some teachers also believe that codeswitching between the L1 and TL is necessary for students (Macaro cited in Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).

In Macaro’s study (1997), teachers’ attitudes to L1 use in FL classrooms at the secondary level in England was examined. Teachers reported that the most prominent reasons for L1 use are for giving and clarifying instructions, checking comprehension, translating, giving feedback to pupils and dealing with bad behaviour, dealing with lack of motivation and frustrated and anxious students. They also reported that students’ TL proficiency contributed to the amount of TL used by teachers: higher achieving students increased teachers’ TL use.

Edstrom (2006) conducted a self-evaluation study in terms of L1 use (English) when teaching Spanish at university level. She concludes that one of her underlying reason for L1 use is for connecting with students on a more personal level, as she felt a moral obligation to communicate interest in and respect for her students and creating a positive environment. The second reason is that to avoid stereotypical ideas about the TL culture, she sometimes must use the L1 as the TL proficiency level is too low. Her own laziness was also mentioned as a reason for L1 use.

Kim and Petraki (2009) examined teachers' attitudes to the use of the L1 in EFL classrooms at a Korean school in Vietnam, some of which were native English speakers and some native speakers of Korean. Native English speaker teachers believe the L1 should be avoided as much as possible, whereas Korean teachers believe the L1 can sometimes be useful in students' language learning process. The level of proficiency influenced teachers' attitudes. Majority of teachers, irrespective of their L1, believe Korean should be used frequently or sometimes for beginners for enhancing their confidence and for providing explanations, as opposed to a little or not at all for more proficient students. However, regardless of proficiency level, there are three contexts in which teachers consider L1 use useful: clarifying the meaning of words and expressions, classroom management and explaining grammar rules. Classroom situations in which it is considered least useful are in pair- and group work activities and for giving instructions.

McMillan and Rivers (2011) examined the beliefs of teachers at a Japanese university where an English-only classroom policy was promoted. Some teachers expressed the belief that "the L1 could be used to facilitate and ensure successful communication between students and the teacher" (p. 255), e.g. by translating as it can save time and frustration on part of the student. Other reasons for L1 use are for giving instructions, providing complex definitions, teaching vocabulary or for translating and comparing the structures of the two languages. Some of these reasons correspond with findings from Paker and Karağağaç (2015), which show that teachers use the L1 for communicating with students outside of class (e.g. making jokes, showing empathy etc.), as well as for explaining difficult concepts or ideas, to talk about administrative information (course policies, deadlines, etc.) and to explain grammar rules. Some teachers from McMillan and River's study (2011) also referred to students' level of proficiency as something that needs to be considered. However, some teachers pointed out that maximized TL input is crucial as it will result in more meaningful TL negotiation, which is part of TL learning success.

Yavuz (2012) examined teachers' attitudes on L1 use in EFL teaching at primary schools in Turkey. The teachers in the study state that when working with communicative skills in the classroom, teachers rely on the TL. However, due to different physical conditions of the classrooms, teachers must sometimes use the L1 to instruct the students or for controlling them in a crowded classroom. Lack of motivation or self-confidence on behalf of students, is also a contributing factor to teachers' L1 use. Explaining abstract vocabulary, checking for comprehension and explaining activities were other circumstances in which teachers use the L1. However, some teachers were critical to L1 use as they believe it can

make the students lazy because “when students switch to their native language they are neither cognitive nor analytic in understanding the target language” (Yavuz, 2012, p. 4343).

In a study conducted by Shabir (2017), examining the opinions of EFL teachers on L1 use at an Australian university, results show that even though teachers promote TL use, they do not believe L1 use should be completely banned as it can e.g. reduce students’ anxiety. There are also circumstances in which they find no other choice but to use the L1, e.g. for comprehension checks or when students expect teachers to translate.

### **2.2.2 Opponents of L1 use in FL teaching**

Many opponents of L1 use in FL classrooms highlight the importance of TL input since it is believed to be one of the main components of language learning success. This is given additional strength by Krashen’s ‘comprehensible input hypothesis’, which states “that languages are learnt most effectively when learners are exposed to lots of ‘comprehensible input’ in contexts of real communication” (Littlewood & Yu, 2011, p. 66). Therefore, some researchers claim that negative transfer must be avoided “to ensure that the learner’s first language does not interfere with target-language development” (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009, p. 2). If the goal is for students to develop the ability to think directly in the TL as in the Direct method, it is only attainable if negative transfer is eliminated and hence languages are kept as separate as possible (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Furthermore, L1 use also takes away the opportunities of negotiating in the TL (Turnbull Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

Turnbull and Arnett (2002) argues that even though judicious use of the L1 can be beneficial, e.g. when explaining certain grammatical concepts or for vocabulary, relying too much on the L1 is not a good teaching practice. When learning a FL there is no immediate use of the TL outside the classroom and hence the classroom might be the only place for students to encounter the TL and practice communicating in it. Therefore, it is important that the TL is maximized in the classroom by the teacher as well as the students (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; Nation, 2003; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). The teacher must consequently function as a role model of communicative TL use since they might be students’ primary source of TL input. If teachers use the L1 for different communicative needs in the classroom and abandon the TL “as soon as such needs arise in the immediate classroom situation” (Littlewood cited in Cook, 2001, p. 409), students may feel unconvinced about the communicative function of the TL. If teachers use the TL for all communicative purposes,

then “students are more likely to perceive it as a useful medium for communication and develop more positive motivation to learn it” (Littlewood & Yu, 2011. p. 66).

### **2.2.3 Proponents of L1 use in FL teaching**

Linguists who advocate for judicious L1 use in FL classrooms claim that even though exposure in the form of input is necessary for TL development, it is not sufficient to guarantee language learning since the input must become intake. The L1 can hence be used as a way of internalizing input, i.e. to facilitate the intake process and thereby contribute to TL learning (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).

Different factors are proposed when talking about L1 use, one of which is naturalness, which means that it is more natural to use the L1 in some classroom situations where the teachers and student share the L1. Another factor is effectiveness, which means that it can be more effective to communicate in the L1. Lastly, for shy students or learners who are not yet proficient users of the TL, the sole use of the FL can become a source of embarrassment causing students to be quiet and hence cause an impediment to TL development (Nation, 2003). This approach of establishing solidarity and understanding with students through the L1 may be an efficient way of creating a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom. However, Polio and Duff (cited in Edstrom, 2006) add that “while this may have positive affective consequences, it nonetheless prevents students from receiving input they might be exposed to in ‘real life’ social situations outside the classroom” (p. 287) and hence reinforces the notion that the L1 is the language for genuine communication.

Another argument proposed by researchers is that of cross-linguistic transfer. As opposed to behaviorist researchers who claim transfer will have a negative impact on TL learning, recent research show that using the L1 and the TL somewhat interchangeably can have a positive impact on language learning, mainly because “many scholars now agree that the language of thought for all but the most advanced L2 learners is inevitably his/her L1” (Macaro cited in Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009, p. 5). Consequently, “if prior knowledge is encoded in students’ L1, then the engagement of prior knowledge is inevitably mediated through L1” (Cummins, 2007, p. 232).

If students work with meaning focused tasks which carry a heavy cognitive load and they are restricted to only using the FL, they might get hindered in their language production since they might not have the language proficiency necessary to perform such tasks. Consequently, the L1 may provide students with the linguistic and cognitive support they

need which will allow them to work at a higher level of FL performance, even if it means being allowed to use only a small amount of the L1 in a pre-discussion activity (Nation, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). Otherwise students might miss out on an important cognitive tool as “the L1 provides a familiar and effective way of quickly getting to grips with the meaning and content of what needs to be used in the L2” (Nation, 2003, p. 5). Negotiating meaning using students’ L1 is especially beneficial for learners with low TL proficiency, as TL production is facilitated by allowing students to initiate and sustain successful communication in the L1 (Brooks & Donato cited in Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

Another beneficial aspect of L1 use are the connections between the L1 and TL that students naturally make in their minds by highlighting similarities and differences between the two languages (Cook, 2001; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). Teachers can consequently take advantage of these connections when working with vocabulary, assisting learners in providing definitions of unknown vocabulary more directly, as well as working with translation.

Even though researchers argue for judicious use of the L1 in FL teaching, most of them do however, point out that despite the legitimacy and usefulness of the L1 in certain situations, there is a need of keeping in mind a balanced approach which also recognizes the importance of maximizing FL use in the classroom (Nation, 2003; Cook, 2001; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009). Research by Tang (2002) shows that “limited and judicious use of the mother tongue in the English classroom does not reduce students’ exposure to English, but rather can assist in the teaching and learning processes” (p. 41).

#### **2.2.4 Observational studies regarding teachers’ L1 use in FL teaching**

Macaro (2001) concludes there are three virtual positions that teachers adhere to regarding L1 use in the FL classroom, of which the first is ‘The Virtual Position’. Within this position, teachers see no pedagogical value in using the L1. Teachers’ TL input is consequently crucial since it must provide a TL model which students can learn from. Within ‘The Maximal Position’, teachers see no pedagogical value in L1 use. However, since perfect teaching and learning conditions do not exist, teachers have to resort to the L1 at some points in their teaching. Within ‘The Optimal Position’ teachers see a pedagogical value in L1 use as “some aspects of learning may actually be enhanced by use of the L1. There should therefore be a

constant exploration of pedagogical principles regarding whether and in what ways L1 use is justified” (p. 535).

Keeping these different positions in mind, “studies have regularly found a range from total exclusion (which is rare) to as much as 90% use of the L1, even amongst teachers in apparently similar teaching situations and even when the teachers are native speakers of the TL” (Littlewood & Yu, 2011, p. 64). Studies consequently show that L1 use range from the virtual position to the optimal position, i.e. towards varying degrees of recognition of the L1, “either directly, e.g. as an element in a teaching technique or to explain a difficult point, or indirectly, e.g. to build positive relationships or help manage learning (ibid).

Littlewood and Yu (2011, p. 68-69) list the most common purposes for L1 use in EFL teaching, divided into three different categories:

- Establishing constructive social relationships, e.g. talk with a student about personal matters.
- Communicating complex meanings to ensure understanding and/or save time, e.g. explaining grammar points or giving the meanings of unknown words.
- Maintaining control over the classroom environment, e.g. dealing with discipline problems.

A study using audio recordings of teachers at a university in Turkey shows that teachers often use the L1 mainly “to make the topic/meaning clear (by giving examples, explaining, making extra explanations, etc.), to present & [sic] explain the topic, to give feedback, to teach the meaning of new vocabulary, to translate sentences that the instructor utters or those in the book/listening text without considering if it is understood or not, and to give/explain tasks or instructions” (Paker & Karaağaç, 2015, p. 115).

A study by Tang (2002) shows that teachers usually resort to the L1 when students cannot understand their TL explanations, e.g. when explaining new vocabulary, for grammar and to convey the meaning of complex ideas and finally for giving instructions. These findings are similar to those from Tsagari and Diakou (2015), which show that teachers used the L1 as “an invaluable teaching tool for teaching new vocabulary, reading and grammar, giving instructions for tests and helping students understand difficult concepts” (p. 96). In Edstrom’s (2006) study, results show that the L1 is mainly used for: “grammar instruction, for classroom management, and to compensate for a lack of comprehension” (p. 283).

In the observational study conducted by Kim and Petraki (2009) the level of proficiency is the main factor which affect the use of the L1. The “observations suggest that beginner students depend on L1 for effective learning of L2, whereas advanced students depend on high L2 use” (p. 71-72). On the intermediate level on the other hand, there seemed to be a more balanced approach to L1 use.

### **2.2.5 L1 use in multilingual FL classrooms**

Most of the research and studies performed within the area of L1 use in FL classrooms revolve around classrooms where the students and teachers share the same L1. However, this is not the situation in many EFL classrooms and therefore, the issue of multilingualism must be taken into consideration. Codeswitching is an interesting aspect of teaching in a multilingual FL classroom. Butzkamm (2003) claims that we need to associate new knowledge with already existing knowledge, and therefore, if the L1 is excluded from teaching, it may deprive students of a rich source for building cross-linguistic networks. Consequently, if we look at students not “as an imperfect monolingual speaker of the second language but as a budding multilingual whose model is the multilingual speaker, it therefore seems reasonable to expect and allow codeswitching to emerge naturally within second and foreign language classrooms” (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009, p. 7). Furthermore, rather than looking at codeswitching as a sign of deficiency in the TL, it must be looked upon as a characteristic feature of bilingual talk (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).

## **3 Method and Material**

### **3.1 Introduction**

A qualitative approach was chosen as the empirical study aims to make an in-depth study of both individual teachers’ beliefs about L1 use in EFL classrooms as well as observing the teachers’ actual L1 use. Therefore, the collection of data was primarily conducted through observations followed by complementary interviews with each teacher. The study is consequently a classroom-based ethnographic study linked with a qualitative interview study. The ethnographic methodology was considered the most suitable approach for the study, since it enabled the use of extensive classroom observations as a data collection method. That way, the researcher can get a holistic view of the research setting. The ethnographic approach also enables ethnographic interviews which can “provide rich sources of in-depth data, and can

lead to important critical insights, especially about informants' understandings and priorities" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 34-35).

Observations serve the purpose of collecting "data from 'real life' situations which are as far as possible undistorted by the researcher, in a way which conveys the subjective reality of the interior world of the participants" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 6). Classroom observations were therefore conducted to examine the language used in a few EFL classrooms in Sweden. When observing, the researcher took on an outsider role, which means that there was no participation but solely observation, as the aim of the observations is to examine teachers' practices in the classroom without any interference.

The inclusive approach to research, i.e. the use of different data collection methods and comparison across these is a key component of ethnographic research, commonly known as "triangulation" (Harklau, 2005; McKay, 2006; Walford, 2008). By employing a triangulation of methods, it simultaneously generates rich and diverse forms of data which the researcher can make use of to examine the issue of language of instruction through a multi-dimensional perspective (Walford, 2008).

Some researchers may argue that another approach would be more beneficial for the research aim, more precisely conducting a case study. A case study approach also takes on a qualitative approach to research, as one of its distinctive features is that "it focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perceptions of events" (McKay, 2006, p. 71). However, an ethnographic methodology was employed mainly because it allowed the triangulation of data collection methods which made it more suitable for the research aim of this study, since it allowed the researcher to combine and compare the different data in the final analysis.

### 3.2 Educational setting and participants

The study was conducted at an upper secondary school in Sweden during the researcher's teaching practice period for 7 weeks in the 2017 spring term. At the school, there was a total of ten EFL teachers of which four agreed to be part of the study. The teachers therefore represent a choice of convenience. The four teachers were all actively teaching English at different levels, at lower secondary as well as upper secondary level. Most of the teachers also taught an additional subject for which they had a matching teacher's qualification (see Table 1).

Table 1: Teachers in the study

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Years of experience</i>	<i>L1</i>	<i>Subjects taught</i>
<i>Teacher A</i>	Female	60	30	Swedish	English / History
<i>Teacher B</i>	Female	52	2	Swedish	English
<i>Teacher C</i>	Male	30	3	German	English / German
<i>Teacher D</i>	Female	38	10	Swedish	English / Swedish

Teachers A and D had experience working at upper secondary level as well as within adult education, whereas teachers B and C had quite recently finished their teacher education and were consequently fairly new in the field of teaching.

### 3.3 Qualitative data

The material which the study is based upon, is the qualitative data collected during the time of the study, i.e. field notes from observations and data from interviews with the teachers. The observations did not include any participation on behalf of the researcher but solely observation. The researcher’s identity has been openly recognized in the classroom and has taken the form of ‘shadowing’ teachers, witnessing first hand and in detail the issue of language of instruction (Denscombe cited in Pole & Morrison, 2003).

“Participant observation involves not only gaining access to and immersing oneself in new social worlds, but also producing written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of these worlds to others” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2007, p. 352), i.e. so-called field notes. Collecting thorough field notes is essential for a quality ethnographic study. The researcher did not follow any existing observation scheme, as none was found that could be adopted in its entirety for the aim of the study. Moreover, since the researcher wanted to observe if and, in that case, how, when and to what extent the L1 might be used in EFL teaching, following a set observation scheme could be difficult since it was impossible to know beforehand what categories to include in such a scheme. Therefore, the field notes were organized according to Patton’s suggestions (cited in McKay, 2006): they contain what people say, the researcher’s own reactions and interpretations and are descriptive (see appendix B for an example).

The interviews that were carried out as part of the data collection were semi-structured, which implies that there was an overall framework consisting of specific questions that had to be asked, but new ideas could be brought up as a result of the interviewee's answers. The interview guide approach as McKay (2006) calls it, has the advantage "that the same content is covered with each participant, which makes it easier to compile the data" (p. 52). However, the questions used were open-ended so that the interviewees could respond on their own terms. The semi-structured form of the interview allowed the researcher greater flexibility to expand, develop and clarify the interviewees' responses (Pole & Morrison, 2003), without losing track of the structure of the interview guide. The goal of the interviews was that they would promote self-evaluation on behalf of the teachers' participating concerning the issue of language of instruction in EFL teaching (see appendix A for the interview guide).

### 3.4 Procedure

This following section will describe the procedure of the study as well as its limitations and ethical considerations. Before any data was collected, the participating teachers were all informed about the research project, i.e. they were asked to be observed prior to the interviews that would be carried out during the final week. Conducting observations prior to carrying out interviews, was a conscious decision to be able to observe the actual use of the L1 in four EFL classrooms, without the teachers knowing that was the specific object of interest. This was planned accordingly to the aim of the study which was to be able to compare findings from classroom observations with the responses given during the interviews for each individual teacher. The teachers were therefore not informed about the specific research aim at the beginning, as the goal was to observe teachers' use of the L1 in EFL teaching without as little interference as possible.

Classroom observations were conducted in classes ranging from English at lower secondary level (beginners English at Language introduction at upper secondary school) to English 7, consequently observing a range of proficiency levels. The researcher solely participated quietly and did not interfere with the teaching in any way, but solely made extensive field notes. The interviews were carried out in Swedish, even though not all participating teachers had Swedish as their L1 since it is more likely to capture nuances of language that teachers might not be able to give in a FL, even though they are proficient users of that FL. The interviews were carried out at the current school after working hours and all in all the interviews took no more than twenty minutes for each teacher. All teachers gave their

consent to being recorded during the interview. The collected data from classroom observations and the interviews were then analyzed. During the transcription of the interviews, similarities and differences between participants were noted before doing a comparison between the content of the interviews and the observations. Lastly, the collected data were analyzed in terms of its pedagogical implications.

### 3.5 Limitations

Even though much work has been put into the study to guarantee as far as possible that it is valid and reliable, there are some aspects that might hinder this. First, ethnographic approach to research is concerned with the study of social life in naturally occurring settings. However, the mere presence of a researcher might influence the way in which participants behave. Furthermore, it is impossible to verify the data, especially in terms of reliability, since it would be difficult for another researcher to conduct a replica of the study and come to similar findings. In terms of field notes, they might also influence the study's reliability since they are inevitably selective on behalf of the observer. "The ethnographer writes about certain things that seem 'significant', ignoring and hence 'leaving out' other matters that do not seem significant. In this sense, fieldnotes never provide a 'complete' record" (Atkinson cited in Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2007, p. 353). Consequently, interviews were also conducted as a way of creating a more versatile collection of data (Arvastson & Ehn, 2009). It is also possible that the data collected during observations might not be an accurate representation of the reality of teaching, since the teachers might have altered their language according to what they believe is the "correct" language to use in front of an observer.

Another limitation is that of few participants, as few cases provide little evidence for generalizing. However, since the collection of data is conducted during a limited period and the study aims to thoroughly observe and examine teachers' use of and beliefs about L1 use, the number of participants may be considered sufficient. The results cannot be seen as a general truth, but rather as examples of contemporary practices and thoughts from a few EFL teachers in Sweden. However, the participants do constitute forty per cent of the English teacher at one school and might therefore be indicative of what teachers at other similar schools may think.

Regarding the interviews, one must always take into consideration the power structures that exist between the interviewer and interviewee which can affect the study's credibility and reliability, i.e. the interviewee might answer in ways which he/she believes are the "correct"

answers. Another limitation that needs to be taken into consideration is that some quantitative researchers claim that semi-structured interviews are too closely tied to the researcher's own interpretations and that one cannot generalize from such a small sample (Bryman, 2002).

In conclusion, there are some limitations to the study, but the triangulation of methods can increase the study's credibility and validity since the data is collected and analyzed through different perspectives.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

All teachers approved classroom observations and subsequent interviews. The participating teachers were all guaranteed full confidentiality before any data was collected and they were informed that they were free to leave the study at any given time. The teachers were offered to participate voluntarily in accordance with the Swedish Research Council's code of research ethics in human and social sciences (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

## 4 Results

This section will present the data collected from classroom observations and interviews, each subsection corresponding to the research questions.

### 4.1 Teachers' beliefs about L1 use in EFL teaching

The teachers' interpretations of the sentence "Teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English" (Skolverket, p. 1, 2011), are similar to each other, i.e. that the majority of classroom activities should be conducted in English. Teacher A, however, claims that it is an impossible task to use English for all purposes, since a lot of students simply will not understand. Teacher D has somewhat changed her initial interpretation of the sentence, due to exposure to linguistic research:

I must admit that my view regarding L1 use has changed a bit during the last years because of research that shows that if you teach a linguistically homogenous group where

the group have the L1 in common, it is beneficial for language development to use that language, so I use it more now than when I was a new teacher (Teacher D).<sup>4</sup>

Teacher C believes the only situation where it is appropriate to use Swedish is in case of communication breakdown. Swedish can consequently be used to improve communication and to ensure students' understanding of classroom activities. However, the teacher points out that:

I believe much is won by, instead of immediately translating into Swedish, rephrasing sentences in English, because if they hear it in Swedish first they will only hear that and ignore what was being said earlier in English [pause] and that is not beneficial for anyone (Teacher C).<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Level of classes

All teachers claim that the level of the class to some extent affects the language of instruction, even though the intention is to use as much English as possible regardless of level. Teacher C and teacher D, however, claim that it is individual needs rather than the actual educational level of the class which affect the language of instruction:

You use Swedish differently in the classroom. If they work individually and I walk around the classroom [pause] when I talk to some students I will do it in Swedish, explaining a word, an expression or an instruction, whereas I do not use any Swedish with other students because I know they do not need it. I adjust to individual needs (Teacher D).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Author's translation of: " "Jag måste erkänna att min syn angående att använda modersmålet har ändrats under de senaste åren för det har kommit ny forskning som visar att om man undervisar en språkligt homogen grupp där gruppen har modersmålet gemensamt, så är det till gagn för utvecklingen att man använder det språket, så jag gör det mer nu än jag gjorde när jag var ny lärare".

<sup>5</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag tror att man vinner mycket på att, istället för att direkt översätta till svenska, kan säga samma mening på olika sätt, för om de bara hör översättningen på svenska så kommer de bara höra det och ignorera vad som tidigare sagt på engelska [paus] och då är ingenting vunnet".

<sup>6</sup> Author's translation of: "Man använder svenska olika i klassrummet. Om de jobbar individuellt och jag går runt i klassrummet [paus] när jag pratar med vissa elever så gör jag det på svenska, förklarar ett ord, ett begrepp eller en instruktion, medans jag inte använder svenska med andra elever eftersom jag vet att de inte behöver det. Jag anpassar mig efter individuella behov".

It doesn't really have to do with on which level I am teaching, but the class in itself and the individuals in it. It can be an extremely talented English 5-class where you never have to use Swedish and an English 7-class which is not at all on the same level. It varies a lot (Teacher C).<sup>7</sup>

However, most of the teachers expect that students should have a certain level of proficiency in English 7, which implies English can be used for all communicative purposes. A high level of language proficiency might, however, also be found in an English 5 class. Teaching is consequently all about perceptiveness of different needs in different classes.

In general, in classes where there are less proficient users of English, e.g. in Language introduction classes, Swedish is used more frequently by teacher A in terms of translating and making comparisons between the two languages:

I look at it as an advantage for many of the students because then English won't just be English, but a mix of both English and Swedish learning (Teacher A).<sup>8</sup>

Even though teacher B tries to use English for all purposes, being able to communicate is the most important aspect of teaching and hence affects the language of instruction:

A situation where I would NOT feel comfortable using English, is if a student with very low proficiency in English would not understand what I say. And to continue talking in English in that situation, it would feel very uncomfortable to not have the opportunity of using Swedish (Teacher B).<sup>9</sup>

The risk of potentially leaving less proficient students feeling left behind because they do not understand what is being said or going on in the classroom is very important to avoid.

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<sup>7</sup> Author's translation of: "Det har egentligen inte så mycket att göra med vilken nivå jag undervisar på, utan på klassen och individerna i den. Det kan vara en jätteduktig Eng. 5 klass där man aldrig behöver byta till svenska och en Eng. 7 klass som inte alls är på samma nivå. Det varierar väldigt mycket".

<sup>8</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag ser det som en fördel för många elever för då är engelskan inte bara engelska, utan en mix av både engelska och svenska inlärning".

<sup>9</sup> Author's translation of: "Ett tillfälle där jag INTE skulle känna mig bekväm i att använda engelska, är om en lågpresterande elev inte förstår vad jag säger. Och att fortsätta prata på engelska då i den situationen, det skulle kännas väldigt obekvämt att inte ha möjligheten att använda svenska".

In classes where most students are proficient users of English, Swedish is used only in exceptional cases. English is consequently used for most communicative purposes. Most vocabulary learning is conducted in English, using vocabulary in context or TL synonyms or opposites:

When it comes to vocabulary, I hardly ever translate into Swedish [...] but some words, even after having rephrased in multiple ways, students do not understand them. Then you end up in situations where you have to explain a word in Swedish because you realize they don't even know the word in Swedish. It is very frustrating (Teacher A).<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.1.2 L1 use – a conscious decision?

L1 use in EFL teaching is mostly a conscious choice by the teachers, especially when it comes to grammar, in which it is used in a contrastive sense to highlight linguistic differences and/or similarities between the two languages. Many teachers believe English grammar is a problematic area to explain and discuss in English, hence the use of Swedish:

When it comes to grammar, I think it is better to change into their L1 so that there will not be any misunderstandings. It is a difficult situation to do it in English because Swedish students are not used to the correct grammatical terms [pause] they do not know what a direct object is [pause] and then it is not very good to talk about it in English (Teacher C).<sup>11</sup>

[...] many experienced teachers believe it is not good to use English when e.g. teaching grammar and that it is stupid to not take advantage of and make use of the common language (Teacher B).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Author's translation of: "När det kommer till vokabulär, så översätter jag sällan till svenska [paus] men vissa ord, även om man förklarar på olika sätt, så förstår inte eleverna. Då hamnar man i situationer där man får förklara ord på svenska för man inser att de inte ens kan ordet på svenska. Det är väldigt frustrerande".

<sup>11</sup> Author's translation of: "När det kommer till grammatik så tycker jag att det är bättre att byta till deras modersmål så att det inte blir några missförstånd. Det är en svår situation att göra det på engelska för svenska elever är inte vana vid de korrekta grammatiska termerna [paus] de vet inte vad ett direct object är [paus] och då är det inte så bra att prata om det på engelska".

<sup>12</sup> Author's translation of: "[...]väldigt många erfarna lärare tycker att det är väldigt dumt att använda engelska när man till exempel undervisar grammatik och att det är dumt att inte utnyttja och använda det gemensamma språket".

Working contrastively with English and Swedish grammar is an important aspect of students' TL success according to teachers, since students can relate new information to information that is already known from the L1:

If I create awareness of the differences between the languages, then I will remember it. Grammar is something that needs to be learned, I actually have to learn certain rules, it won't just come by itself as many think, or at least thought during the 70's and 80's [pause] that if you only shower them in English, they will understand how language is connected, but that is obviously bullshit (Teacher A).<sup>13</sup>

Teacher B is, however, not completely convinced about the positive outcomes of teaching grammar in Swedish:

Well, I am not sure about that. I believe [pause] I do not have enough teaching experience to determine that. I [pause] No, I can't. Well, I have only heard about it, many teachers say it, or several teachers I have spoken to think it is self-evident to use Swedish (Teacher B).<sup>14</sup>

Use of the L1 when working with vocabulary is another conscious decision to use the L1:

It would be a waste of a great language learning tool if we did not use the common language, especially for working with vocabulary (Teacher D).<sup>15</sup>

There is, however, an opposing view to the use of the L1 as a language learning strategy:

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<sup>13</sup> Author's translation of: "Om jag skapar en medvetenhet mellan språken, då kommer jag komma ihåg det. Grammatik är något som man måste lära sig, jag måste faktiskt lära mig vissa regler, det kommer inte bara av sig själv som många tror, eller i alla fall trodde under 70- och 80-talet [paus] att om man bara duschar dem med engelska så kommer de förstå hur språk hänger ihop, men det är uppenbarligen skitsnack".

<sup>14</sup> Author's translation of: "Tja, jag är inte säker på det. Jag tror [paus] Jag har inte tillräcklig lärarerfarenhet för att avgöra det. Jag [paus] Nej, jag kan inte. Tja, jag har bara hört det, många lärare säger det, eller flera lärare jag pratat med tycker att det är självklart att använda svenska".

<sup>15</sup> Authors's translation of: "Det skulle vara ett slöseri med ett bra språkinlärningsverktyg att inte använda det gemensamma språket, särskilt när det gäller ordförråd".

If you get used to using Swedish when you are insecure about an English word [pause] it is not good. You won't be able to do that if you're in the United Kingdom. It doesn't mean you can't do it, but I think it is important that you keep it in mind (Teacher C).<sup>16</sup>

Intentional use of Swedish can also be used for other purposes, such as explaining or repeating instructions, as teachers need to make sure their students understand what they are supposed to do. Communicating with less proficient students is another conscious decision for L1 use, as well as using it for authentic purposes such as telling students about different kinds of school related information.

L1 use is often a conscious decision, but sometimes it's about myself being too tired [pause] because it is an effort even for me to use English at all times (Teacher B).<sup>17</sup>

Even though the use of Swedish is mostly a conscious choice, teacher B mentions lack of energy as a contributing factor for unintentional L1 use.

## 4.2 Teachers' beliefs regarding other L1s than Swedish in EFL teaching

When it comes to the teachers' attitudes regarding the fact that there are different L1s in a classroom, most of the teachers claim they are aware of it but do not really know how to practically handle the multilingual situation in the classroom:

No, I don't know how I am supposed to help them with that, it is completely outside my competence (Teacher B).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Author's translation of: "Om man vänjer sig vid att använda svenska när man är osäker på ett engelskt ord [paus] det är inte bra. Du har inte chansen att göra det i Storbritannien. Det betyder inte att man inte får göra det, men det är viktigt att man har det i åtanke".

<sup>17</sup> Author's translation of: "Att använda modersmålet är ofta ett medvetet val, men ibland handlar det om att jag själv är för trött [paus] för det är en ansträngning även för mig att använda engelska hela tiden".

<sup>18</sup> Author's translation of: "Nej jag vet inte hur jag skulle kunna hjälpa dem med det, det är ju helt utanför min kompetens".

I don't really know how. I have students who have Chinese as their L1 and I still have to proceed from English or Swedish because I have no idea [pause] best case scenario would of course be if I somehow proceeded from Chinese, but you know ... (Teacher C).<sup>19</sup>

The situation in which most teachers consider it appropriate to also include other L1s than Swedish is for translation of words.

If I can't explain certain concepts that they do not yet know in Swedish, which language should I use? If they can't understand it in Swedish, then they can't possibly understand it in English (Teacher A).<sup>20</sup>

Teacher A, who advocated for contrasting TL grammar structures with the L1, concludes that it is not possible with any other L1s than Swedish:

No no no, absolutely not. They cannot stick to their L1, it [pause] well of course they stick to their L1, but it cannot be used as language of instruction. Then they will never develop their language skills (Teacher A).<sup>21</sup>

Most of the work with trying to include different L1s in EFL classrooms is consequently based upon students' working individually with translation of words into their L1 using digital translating tools.

Teacher D did not consider the use of other languages than Swedish at all, since her classes in the present year was linguistically homogenous and therefore using only Swedish as the L1 is not considered a problem. However, having had classes in the past in which students did not share the same L1 she explains that it is beneficial for those students with another L1 than Swedish to be paired together and to help each other with the support of the L1, e.g. through translation.

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<sup>19</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag vet inte riktigt hur. Jag har elever som har kinesiska som modersmål och jag får ändå utgå från engelska och svenska för jag har ingen aning [paus] i bästa fallet skulle jag självklart bygga på det men du vet ...".

<sup>20</sup> Author's translation of: "Om jag inte kan förklara vissa begrepp som de ännu inte förstår på svenska, vilket språk ska jag använda? För om de inte kan förstå ett begrepp på svenska, kan de omöjligt förstå det på engelska".

<sup>21</sup> Author's translation of: "Nej nej nej, absolut inte. De kan inte hålla sig till deras modersmål [paus] alltså såklart de kan hålla sig till sitt modersmål men det kan inte användas som undervisningsspråk. Då kommer de aldrig utveckla deras språkkunskaper".

## 4.3 Findings from classroom observations regarding L1 use

The following sections will present the data collected from classroom observations, divided into two sections regarding the areas in which the L1 is used and the amounts used.

### 4.3.1 Observed areas for L1 use in EFL teaching

There are some areas for which the L1 is most often used: the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. All teachers used Swedish to greater or lesser extent when working with grammar in the classroom, mainly to introduce and explain different grammatical structures. When working with vocabulary, Swedish is mainly used to translate words. Most of the translation is done by the teacher orally in class, but it is also done using bilingual word lists:

25 mins of individual work with word lists in Google classroom.

- Create a document that you call Vocabulary list.
- Choose 5-10 words from the text. Write them in your list together with a translation and description (Extract from field notes from teacher D, at 12.15 on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017).

Another occasion in which Swedish is used is for discussing knowledge requirements and grades at all levels. Swedish is also used for some authentic purposes by the teacher, e.g. when talking about homework. Swedish is also predominantly used for disciplining students, i.e. to maintain control over classroom environment.

### 4.3.2 Observed amounts of L1 use at different educational levels

The extent to which Swedish is used during class and when it is used mainly depend on the level of the class, i.e. lower or upper secondary level courses.

#### 4.3.2.1 *L1 use in EFL teaching at Language introduction (lower secondary school level)*

The use of Swedish differs between the teachers, especially in courses at lower secondary school level. At the time of the study, only teacher A and B taught these courses. For teacher A, the majority of classroom activities were conducted in Swedish, by the teacher as well as the students. In the classes observed, grammar was the focus and grammatical items and

structures were all explained in Swedish. The only exception being when the teacher did dictations, i.e. testing the students' listening and writing ability in English. In summary, Swedish was used as a means for learning English but also for more authentic reasons such as disciplining the students or asking and answering questions about other things than the actual content of the lesson. Teacher B on the other hand, made less use of Swedish as the language of instruction. Lesson activities were introduced and explained in English. It was also used for purposes such as asking for help with technological issues or discussing varying issues. When handing back texts to the students with individual feedback, English was used to discuss certain grammatical features that students had to consider when re-writing the texts.

Today: "Looking forward".

1. Introduction: English speaking countries. "Not just a narrow circle of English speaking countries, but countries where English has an official role because of e.g. colonization: Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, India etc.". Each student chooses a country and will later on present it in class.
2. Listening comprehension, 10 mins: "A pub in Ireland". Pre-listening stage, 35 mins: Facts about Ireland, all in English, e.g. member of the European union and Emeralds Island (Extract from field notes from teacher B, at 08.00 on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

In the cases Swedish is used by teacher B, it is for the translation of new words. However, students' use of Swedish is more extensive than the sole translation of a few words, but it is rather the preferred choice of language for students in all communicative situations. Most of the time when students have individual questions asked in Swedish, the teacher answers in English. However, questions regarding certain grammatical features and knowledge requirements of the course are answered in Swedish.

#### **4.3.2.2 L1 use in EFL teaching at upper secondary school level**

Having observed classes ranging from English 5 to English 7 at upper secondary level, some differences in L1 use have been noted. In English 5, Swedish is used more often as compared to English 7, in which L1 use is essentially phased out. However, there are individual differences between teachers.

##### *- English 5*

In English 5, teacher B makes use of Swedish to a small extent. During the observed lessons, the focus is on grammar, more specifically five grammatical structures which might be

problematic for Swedish EFL students. English is used almost exclusively to explain and discuss the different grammatical structures, with the only exception of translating a few words; namely the Swedish translation of some of the grammatical terms that are used. The translations are mainly used in the sense of making comparisons between the two languages. Students solely use Swedish when asking questions about the content, but the teacher is consistent in her use of English when answering questions in front of the whole class. However, during individual work when students ask questions in Swedish, the teacher responds in Swedish, explaining different grammatical rules.

Teacher C focuses on oral communication during the observed classes, practicing before the national exams. All instructions regarding the communicative exercise are conducted in English, but once the students start discussing in groups most of them converse in Swedish. The teacher is, however, consistent in his use of English. Even when some students ask questions or speak to him in Swedish, he always responds in English. The advice that the teacher gives the students before the oral national exam is to never use Swedish during the discussion, but to always try to rephrase what they want to say in English. English is also used in a more authentic way by using it for disciplining, e.g. asking students to put down their phones.

Preparation national exams, 30 mins, in small groups.

Some groups discuss in Swedish, but the teacher solely uses English for all purposes: instructions, answering questions, discussions, disciplining students (“I see you looking at your phones. I don’t know how you guys keep up a conversation but...”). (Extract from field notes from teacher C, at 11.00 on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

#### - *English 6*

In both classes observed taught by teacher C and D, the focus is on literary discussions of novels and short stories. Teacher C uses English for all classroom purposes: for communicating and discussing with the students. However, in this group students tend to use Swedish with each other and with the teacher. The only time the teacher uses Swedish is for translating a few words, but he then continues by explaining them more thoroughly in English. The only time the teacher seems to use Swedish in a more conscious way is when students ask questions regarding grammatical aspects, in which the teacher makes comparisons between Swedish and English sentences. Observations in teacher D’s class show that much of the content revolve around learning new vocabulary, through reading, speaking

and writing. One of the learning activities used for vocabulary is the word game ‘Taboo’ where students pick a card with a word and must explain that word using other English words, even though there is a translation of the word into Swedish. Another activity is the individual construction of word lists by the students, where they are supposed to write down 5-10 new words on every lesson and translate them into Swedish. When the students work individually, there are times when teacher D uses Swedish to help some students with translations or repeating instructions.

There is one student the teacher gets back to several times during the lesson and the conversation between the two is always in Swedish: translating words into and repeating instructions (Extract from field notes from teacher D, at 13.00 on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

- *English 7*

Common for all classes in English 7 and independent of the teacher is that the majority of classroom activities are conducted in English, by the teacher as well as the students. During lectures as well as discussions, English is the language of instruction. Even when students ask questions in Swedish, most of the times they are answered in English by all teachers. Words are also predominantly explained in English, with only one exception of a Swedish translation.

- Modernism.

Most words are described in English, even the fairly complex ones (e.g. influx, defecation, emblematic). One translation to Swedish: omniscient (allvetande). But the teacher continues by explaining the word in English: “the voice that knows everything, that lets the reader know what is going on” (Extract from field notes from teacher B, at 08.00 on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

The one classroom activity which does not follow the above-mentioned pattern of English being the language of instruction is a contrastive analysis in teacher D’s class. Students must read assigned pages in a novel intensively and translate that passage word by word into Swedish. They are supposed to look for interesting differences between English and Swedish in terms of grammar, phrases, words etc. and afterwards select the five most important findings and present them in class where they must explain what the contrasts consist of.

## 5 Discussion

In this chapter, each sub-section will be discussed in accordance with the previously mentioned research questions.

### 5.1 Teachers' attitudes to Swedish in EFL teaching

All teachers shared the same initial interpretation regarding the sentence “English should as far as possible be the language of instruction” from the syllabus (Skolverket, p. 1, 2011), as they all interpreted it to mean that English should be used most of the time in the classroom and for the majority of the communicative purposes. The interpretation can to some extent prove that the monolingual principle has become internalized in some EFL classrooms in Sweden, as in most educational institutions (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007). However, the study also shows that some teachers have started questioning this principle, even though it can be difficult challenging a norm that has been internalized by both educators and researchers. All teachers question it to different degrees, mostly by incorporating Swedish on a small scale, e.g. when working with vocabulary. Teacher D has a more thoughtful approach to the use of Swedish, referring to her own pedagogical experience as well as linguistic research which show that students may benefit from L1 use. Results from a study conducted by Macaro (cited in Turnbull-Dailey-O’Cain, 2009) show that “some items of vocabulary might be better learnt through a teacher providing first-language equivalents because this triggers deeper semantic processing than might occur by providing second-language definitions or paraphrases” (p. 49).

Teacher B on the other hand, questions the use of the L1 from a different perspective. She mentioned that the majority of her colleagues strongly promote the use of Swedish when teaching English grammar as it will enhance students’ learning, but she claims it is not until now, when she has more practical experience as a teacher, that she started questioning the usefulness of L1 use when it comes to grammar teaching. However, it is not always an easy task to question the teaching practices of more experienced colleagues.

The English classes in Language introduction is an interesting aspect to consider with regards to language of instruction, since the teaching in the two classes differ greatly. Teacher A uses almost solely Swedish as the language of instruction as she believes that is the only language teachers and students have in common, as opposed to teacher B who uses almost solely English as she believes it naturally becomes the common language for her and the

students. However, since they are still beginners of English, Swedish is still used at some points to maintain communication.

Teachers report that most of their L1 use in the classroom is a conscious decision, to improve understanding and consequently enhance learning. However, teacher B states that being tired can lead to unconscious decisions of L1 use. The amount of L1 used and whether it is considered appropriate is not something that can be defined universally as “it is inseparably linked to the underlying function or purpose” (Edstrom, 2006, p. 289). As so called ‘purposeless’ L1 use is considered unacceptable in the FL classroom, judicious L1 use that has some sort of function with the intention of enhancing TL learning should be justified in those circumstances. However, one must not forget that every lesson is a different lesson and therefore extensive L1 use may be more justifiable one lesson than it is the next lesson (Edstrom, 2006). L1 use must be considered with regards to different factors, such as the individual needs of both the class and the students. It is, however, important to keep in mind the three factors as mentioned in Cook (2001): efficiency, learning and naturalness. If L1 use can enhance any of these factors with regards to TL development, then it may be worth including the L1 to some extent in EFL teaching. It is therefore important that teachers continue to question the usefulness of L1 use, since it can lead to conscious decisions whether to include it or not in teaching. Strictly banning L1 use in a communicative classroom might reduce the cognitive and metacognitive opportunities available for students.

## 5.2 Teachers’ beliefs about other L1s than Swedish in EFL teaching

Concerning the issue of multilingual classrooms, the teachers said they were all aware of it but did not really know how to work with it practically, other than working with bilingual word lists. As previously mentioned, working contrastively with Swedish is something that all teachers do, especially with grammar. However, this contrastive sense of teaching is not adapted to a multilingual classroom with many different L1s. The monolingual principle has become something which has been taken for granted in FL teaching, due to reasons such as students’ need for maximum TL exposure or simply because students do not share the same linguistic background as the teacher (He, 2012). Even though the teachers point to the importance of working contrastively with languages, this contrastive view of language learning is solely related to English and Swedish. Teacher A claims it is for the benefit of students with other L1s than Swedish, as Swedish is the other language they need to learn, it consequently becomes a win-win situation for them as they can acquire Swedish through EFL

teaching. In a multilingual classroom setting the question of L1 use is complex. The teachers in the study had different opinions concerning which language is the common language in EFL teaching, where teacher A claimed it to be Swedish whereas teacher B claimed it to be English.

### 5.3 Observations regarding L1 use in the EFL classroom

The observations conducted in the study clearly show that there are some aspects of L1 use in EFL teaching which all teachers shared, i.e. the use of Swedish in the teaching of mainly grammar and vocabulary. Research shows that the use of the L1 may function as a supportive aspect in learning of TL grammar, as “FL grammar becomes much less intimidating if we find examples of parallel constructions in the native language” (Butzkamm, 2011, p. 389). The concept of teaching grammar and vocabulary using parallel constructions is one that all teachers share, as they believe it is beneficial for students’ TL learning if they are subjected to a contrastive perspective. The teachers use Swedish systemically for this purpose in three different ways: for highlighting similarities and differences between the two languages and lastly, taking advantage of students’ conceptual understanding in the L1 when teaching vocabulary, all of which has proven to be a valuable resource in the FL teaching and learning process (Nation, 2003; He, 2012). Highlighting similarities and differences between the L1 and TL can “enable learners to notice the ‘gap’ between their inner grammars and the target language” (Kim & Petraki, 2009, p. 73), which proves that judicious use of the L1 may enhance TL development (Cook, 2001).

The level of the class affected the amount of Swedish used during teaching, even though Teacher B and D claimed individual differences as the one factor which mostly affected language of instruction. The higher the level, the more linguistically advanced a class can be expected to be, which consequently implies that the amount of Swedish used in English 7 and in an English class for beginners may differ, which was also proven to be the case. However, teachers still tend to use Swedish for some authentic purposes in the classroom, like giving additional information about something that is not directly linked to the content of the lesson or for disciplining students in some way. The use of the L1 for authentic purposes like this can be applied to the factor of naturalness promoted by Cook (2001), meaning that teachers and learners simply feel more comfortable using the L1 for these purposes. However, this dimension of TL communication in the classroom might deprive learners of a useful aspect of pedagogical TL learning, and “since they are so essential, they also provide an ideal

framework for TL communication and input, motivated by real communicative needs (Littlewood & Yu, 2011, p. 69). That way, students can be motivated in learning that the TL can and should be used for all communicative purposes, even if it is not directly linked to the lesson.

Lastly, regardless of the different amounts of L1 used by the teachers in the study, the fact remains that it is explicitly mentioned in the syllabus that “Teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English” (Skolverket, 2011). The content of the syllabus is something that teachers need to adhere to, but keeping the results of the study in mind, it becomes clear that it might come off as ambiguous as the expression ‘as far as possible’ can be interpreted differently by teachers.

## **6 Conclusion**

The results of the study show that L1 use in EFL teaching in Sweden is quite common, even if the amount of L1 use differs. In general, teachers’ beliefs regarding conscious and judicious L1 use in EFL teaching is positive, especially in the teaching of grammar and vocabulary as they believe it is important for students to work with the TL contrastively and hence activate the prior knowledge encoded in the L1. There are, however, some individual differences in teachers’ beliefs about L1 use, as some have started to question it in terms of the actual benefits of teaching certain aspects of the TL with the assistance of the L1.

The main reason for the difference in the amount of L1 use is mainly with regards to the educational level of the class, with less L1 use in more proficient classes. The individual needs of students is also an important factor for judicious L1 use. Teachers also tend to use the L1 for authentic purposes such as talking about content which is not directly linked to school. All teachers insist that judicious L1 use does not equal abandoning the TL, but it is rather about making maximal use of the TL and use the L1 in those circumstances in which it can enhance students’ TL development.

The results of the study implicate that teachers should continue make use of the TL for most communicative needs that arise in the classroom, as they must become a TL role model for the students. However, the study also addresses the possible benefits of incorporating the L1, as it creates the opportunity of activating students’ prior knowledge. However, since the goal of EFL teaching is to learn the TL, it might be appropriate to make use of as much English as possible even though students’ proficiency is limited, as some students’ proficiency might be limited also in Swedish. Teachers must consider every situation in its

own sense, deciding which language might be more appropriate in different situations. Since teachers cannot possibly know every single language spoken in the classroom, students must be given the responsibility of working with their L1 individually. That way, they can make use of the previous knowledge encoded in their L1, e.g. when working with cognitively heavy tasks.

It is important for teachers to question educational traditions and norms, as it can lead to more conscious decision-taking in the classroom. The study can consequently help teachers in becoming more aware of their language of instruction, which is important as it may have a positive effect on students' TL development. However, even though teachers make use of the three factors efficiency, learning and naturalness, they must all be considered alongside the potential loss of TL input and output (Cook, 2001). The goal of EFL teaching remains learning English and it is only practices that undermine this goal which should be avoided (Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009).

In conclusion, the study has shed light on some teachers' use of and beliefs about L1 use in an EFL teaching context in Sweden. It has also to some extent explored the possible benefits of L1 use in FL teaching, which is of relevance for all teachers and educators since it highlights the fact that teachers' use of and beliefs about L1 use can affect TL development. However, there is a call for future research regarding L1 use in FL teaching, not least the need for conducting bigger scale studies to more thoroughly explore teachers' beliefs about and use of the L1. It would also be interesting to learn more about teachers' views on the use of the L1 by students, as many teachers in this study allow students to speak Swedish, sometimes without even reminding them to use English even where is no reason for using Swedish. Another interesting approach would be to learn more about students' views of L1 use in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, there is a call for further research regarding the relationship between L1 use in EFL teaching and students' TL achievement, especially with regards to those areas in EFL teaching that most teachers in the study consider beneficial, i.e. grammar and vocabulary. It is important to learn more about the effectiveness and usefulness of the L1 to better understand which pedagogical implications it might have for an EFL classroom in Sweden.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Intervjuprotokoll – “L1 use in EFL teaching”

#### Förberedelse

- Intervjun ska spelas in. Använd inspelningsverktyg på mobilen.
- Anteckningsblock och penna.

#### Intervjuns struktur

- Semi-strukturerad. Varje intervju går igenom samma struktur och får samma frågor, men beroende på deras svar så kan de komma i olika ordning. Olika följdfrågor kan tillkomma baserat på deras svar.
- Intervjun följer nedanstående mall med frågor.

#### Genomförande

- Följande frågor ska behandlas utifrån denna övergripande strukturen och ordningen:
  1. Hur tänker du kring din undervisning och användningen av engelska i klassrummet?
  2. I ämnesplanen för Engelska (Lgy11) står det att: *“Undervisningen ska i allt väsentligt bedrivas på engelska”*. Hur tolkar du den meningen?
    - Varför tror du att Skolverket har inkluderat denna mening i ämnesplanen?
    - Hur ställer du dig till denna uppmaning?
    - Stämmer uppmaningen överens med hur du själv utformar din engelskundervisning och hur undervisningen utformas på skolan?
  3. Använder du någon gång svenska när du undervisar engelska?  
  
OM JA:
    4. Använder du svenskan på ett medvetet sätt i din engelskundervisning?
      - I så fall, på vilket sätt?
    5. I vilka situationer och för vilka funktioner inkluderar du svenska?
    6. Påverkar klassens nivå din användning av svenska? (Eng. grund, Eng 5 osv.)
      - På vilket sätt?

7. Påverkar elevers individuella nivå din användning av svenska?
  - På vilket sätt?
8. Anser du att användningen av svenska kan vara gynnsam för elevers utveckling av engelska?
9. Anser du att det är lämpligt att använda svenska vid vissa tillfällen i engelskundervisning?
  - Varför / varför inte?
10. Om eleverna inte förstår något du säger på engelska, hur hanterar du det?
11. I dagens svenska skola kan man inte utgå från att alla elever delar samma modersmål. Är detta något du reflekterar över när du undervisar i engelska?
12. Inkluderar du även andra modersmål på något sätt i din engelskundervisning?

## Appendix B

- The following is an example of a field note collected during the study:
- 

### Teacher B: Eng. 5, onsdag 22 februari, kl. 09.25-10.45.

- Introduktion. Förklarar vad som ska hända idag på lektionen, vilket görs tydligt genom instruktioner på tavlan:

“Today: Grammar sum up presentation + individual work”

**PowerPoint pres. (35 min)**, där läraren går igenom två av de grammatiska strukturer som svenska elever brukar ha svårt med när det kommer till engelska. Hon utgår från en lista på 5 olika grammatiska strukturer.

#### 1. *Subject-verb agreement*

Den grammatiska strukturen förklaras på engelska: “the relation between subject and verb must concord”. E.g. I want = first person singular. Present tense, verb in base form.

Alla kommande exempel presenteras på engelska, så även exempelmeningar.

*Do-construction*, e.g. “Does John want pie?”. “The main verb is in its base form”.

#### 2. *The genitive/possessive case*

About ownership, but not always. “Of-construction is used for inanimate objects, e.g. the top of the mountain - hon jämför med **svenskans** motsvarighet: husets topp.

Ett annat exempel: e.g. children’s songs (= barnvisor). Hon översätter ordet till **svenska**.

“Three different ways of expressing possessive case: s-genitive, possessive pronouns, of-construction”.

Många av de grammatiska strukturer som presenteras jämförs med **svenskans** motsvarighet, till exempel att det är svårt med s-genitive för att: “s-genitive without apostrophes in **Swedish**”.

Mestadels förklaras grammatiken på engelska. Dock sker ibland översättningar till **svenska**, t.ex. singular nouns = substantiv i singular. De flesta svenska översättningarna sker dock inte när det gäller specifikt grammatiska uttryck, utan de används mer som en jämförelse mellan engelskan och svenskan, t.ex.: cats - cat’s - cats’ = katterna, kattens, katternas

Nästan alla elever ställer frågor på **svenska** om grammatiken! Läraren svarar dock alltid på engelska under presentationen.

**Efter presentationen (45 min)**: Elever jobbar individuellt med grammatikhäfte.

Elev ställer individuell fråga till läraren på svenska: läraren svarar och förklarar den grammatiska strukturen (s-genitive) på **svenska**. Ännu en elev ställer fråga på svenska om annat än specifikt grammatik - läraren svarar på **svenska**.