Classroom talk

- Approaches for Teaching English as a Second Language

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Abstract

In the Swedish curriculum (2011) it is clearly stated that the goal is for the students to develop communicative abilities in English and, furthermore, Skolinspektionen (2010) insists that the teacher should use the target language as much as possible when communicating with the students. Yet, many teachers are hesitant and insecure about speaking English and therefore, it is important to emphasise the positive effects of classroom talk. There is an ongoing debate, since the 1980s whether the more traditional, grammar focused, teaching methods or the communicative methods are more efficient in SLA. On the one hand, some argue that the L1 should be banned from the L2 classroom and that the teacher and the students should use the target language as much as possible in order to develop a natural, communicative SLA. On the other hand, it has been argued that using the L1 alongside the L2 actually helps the SLA and also that connecting the two languages enhances the students’ self-confidence and language development.

This descriptive literature review has investigated the different points of view in this matter, using a sociocultural perspective. Furthermore, this present study has highlighted different teaching approaches, involving the mix of L1 and L2 and also approaches excluding the L1 completely. The study investigated studies from different countries with focus on classroom talk, motivation and SLA in the early years. One result is that students need to be exposed to the target language as much as possible in order to develop communicative abilities. However, opinions differ when it comes to whether L1 should be banned from language classrooms or embraced alongside the L2. Most of the authors argued against vocabulary lists and translation exercises and warned that activities where language errors are pointed out decrease the student’s motivation and communicative development.

Key words

SLA, L1, L2, classroom talk, scaffolding, WTC, sociocultural perspective.
1. Introduction

This study investigates research concerning the much debated subject whether “banning L1” in the classroom is more efficient for the students’ second language acquisition or if using a combination of L1 and L2 helps the students increase meta linguistic awareness and become more proficient in the foreign language.

In the Swedish curriculum (Lgr11) it is stated that the students are to develop a communicative ability and with confidence be able to use English in various situations and for different purposes. This would require spoken English in the classroom and Lundberg (2011) argues that there is a connection between how much English is spoken in the classroom and the students’ attitude towards English.

From what I have seen of English education in the early years, there is very little English spoken in the classrooms and the teachers I have spoken to all explain that they are aware of the fact that they should speak more English than they do, but that it is difficult to implement as the students are so young. Most of the English lessons that I have observed have included a short film clip in English followed by the students filling out stencils and there has been little or no classroom talk, dialogue in English or exercises where the students actually speak English.

Arguments against the fact that students need to be exposed to English in order to develop their vocabulary, intonation and pronunciation seem to be lacking, but for many years now, there has been a debate whether L1 should be banned in the classroom or if L1 and L2 provide the students with compound bilingualism and that using them simultaneously helps the learning process (Cook, 2001).

1.2 Aim and purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate research concerning second language acquisition (SLA) and to analyze different teaching-methods used in teaching English as a second language to young learners in order to answer the following questions:

- What does research say concerning the use of L1 and L2 in the classroom when it comes to learners’ acquisition, motivation, and confidence?
- Which methods are considered most efficient in second language acquisition with young learners?
The general frame of this study is the sociocultural perspective, i.e. it is based on the assumption that language learning is an active process achieved through social interaction and not a finished product of knowledge (Ellis, 2012).

2. Method

The present study is a descriptive literature review where relevant studies have been identified for the purpose of exploring and discussing the research questions. Specifically, the objective was to identify studies representing different points of view concerning L1 and L2 in the classroom and associated approaches. I have searched literature in English but also in Swedish to be able to include strategies for teaching Swedish students English as a second language. Most of the articles in English give a view of SLA in general, irrelevant of the student’s first language.

The specific search terms used were “SLA”, “Classroom talk”, “language pedagogy”, “engelska i grundskolan” (English in primary school) and “English language learners”. In addition, some relevant literature was found through suggestions from my mentors. The search was limited to texts that have been peer reviewed. Specific studies were then manually selected for inclusion based on their titles and abstracts.

The inclusion criteria involved finding authors who argue either for or against using L1 in the L2 classroom and studies that are relevant to teaching English in the early years. Many interesting studies on the subject were excluded because they had been done with students in upper secondary school and I limited my study to SLA in the early years.

I also searched literature with focus on motivation, interaction and communication in the L2 classroom in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of factors that can affect the student’s SLA. Empirical studies done before the year 2000 were excluded, but some older literature concerning language pedagogy and the debate concerning L1 was purposely included in order to get a better view of the ongoing debate and the more traditional teaching methods. The final inclusion criterion was literature that suggests different teaching methods and activities with a clear standpoint and explanation why these methods are to be preferred.
2.1 Sociocultural perspective

This study takes a sociocultural perspective as starting point as formulated by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky’s theories provides a basis for most of these scholars in this present study.

Pedagogical models within the sociocultural view on teaching and learning take on the relationship between output and input, and lean on engagement in meaningful activity, achieved by the students’ interaction and relation with the environment (Van Compernolle and Williams, 2012). Furthermore, Razfar, Licón and Chval (2011) explain that the sociocultural theory lifts the importance of symbols, signs and language as most important mediational tools and also, that the acquisition of linguistic structures is a result of problem solving and interaction. The authors bring attention to Vygotsky’s ideas of assistance and mediation between the expert (the teacher) and the novice (the students) and the idea that students learn, grow, and develop through active engagement between the student, the goals and people with more competence.

From a sociocultural perspective, “[…] language is a means to concrete ends and language serves as a meditational tool for solving problems.” (Razfar, Licón Khisty and Chval, 2011, p. 200). Furthermore, the sociocultural perspective proposes that learning is not a linear process from basics to advanced level, but rather a complex process that brings meaning to objects and actions (Razfar, Licón Khisty and Chval, 2011). The sociocultural theory sees the child as a social creature, and language opens up new opportunities and gives the child a new tool for doing things and organizing information (Cameron, 2012).

To summarize, the sociocultural theory puts the child in a social context and emphasises that learning takes place in interaction and with adults as mediators and in that way, the world is made accessible to the child (Cameron, 2012).

2.2 Definitions

The following terminology and concepts are most central in this study:

First language – L1

Second language – L2

Second language acquisition (SLA) – Children’s development in learning a foreign language and the process by which the language is learnt (Nordquist 2014).

Willingness to communicate (WTC) - Student’s willingness and intention to participate in communication in the classroom and in this case using the L2. (Yiqian, 2013)
Scaffolding – The process when the teacher supports and coaches the student’s learning and helps them build their own ideas and form their own learning process (Scott, 2009). Bruner (1978) explains the concept of scaffolding as the teacher giving the student the appropriate framework of social interactions in order for them to learn how to use language.

Classroom talk – Spoken language in the classroom (Scott, 2009).

Code-switching – Changing from one language to another (Cook, 2001).

Compound bilingualism – Knowing two languages, and having the ability to put them together and let the two work together rather than separating them into different compartments (i.e. coordinate bilingualism) (Cook, 2001).

3. Analysis

I will now account for arguments and research results relevant to this study and account for the different points of view in order to set these against each other in the following discussion.

3.1 Communicative abilities and classroom talk

English teaching used to focus most on writing, but already in the curriculum for the public school (Folkskolan ca. 1842-1962), it was stated that the English education should be held in English as much as possible (Fjelner, 1965). On the other hand, Forsgren (1991) explains that there has been a debate since the 1980s where some argue that the more traditional, grammar focused English education is preferable to the communicative teaching methods and this debate is still ongoing and relevant today (Levihn, Eyre, Forsgren, Fox and Norman, 1991).

The more the teacher speaks English in the classroom, the more the students enjoy learning English according to Lundberg (2011). She encourages English teachers to expose the students to as much spoken English as possible and emphasises the importance of creating a classroom environment where all students dare to and want to use English. Similarly, Forsgren (1991) summarizes the communicative view on teaching English by explaining that communication and interaction are the most important parts of any language; grammar rules are just a small part of it (Levihn, Eyre, Forsgren, Fox & Norman, 1991, pp 16-17).

The student’s learning takes place when they participate and interact and moreover, interaction provides the students with input as well as linguistic forms and allows acquisition to take place (Ellis, 2012). Additionally, Ellis (2012) concludes that interaction nurtures language acquisition but he also points out that there are many different kinds of interaction.
Along the same lines, Cameron (2012) emphasises the need for the students to participate and to build skills and knowledge to be able to participate. Furthermore, she argues that the students need to find meaning in language and see ways to use the language in different contexts as children are driven to find meaning.

Spoken English in the classroom is advocated by Brewster, Ellis & Gerard (2012) who also take into account that the amount of L2 usage will increase as the young learners get more used to the language. The authors illustrate that when the students are listening to English, they develop aspects of the language such as improved pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation. On that same note, Gibbons (2002) recognizes classroom talk as one of the most fundamental and most essential things in learning a language (p.14).

In addition, Gibbons (2002) shares the same theoretical frame of Vygotsky’s ideas of “interaction at the heart of the learning process.” (Gibbons, 2002 p.15). Scott (2009) also shares Vygotsky’s thoughts on children acquiring a deeper understanding than just information through language. In addition, that this starts as a social production and by the process of internalisation, language becomes thought. Scott’s article also illustrates that childhood learning is a social and interactive process. In reality, however, the students only have the opportunity to talk for a few seconds at the time whereas the teachers do most of the talking in the classrooms (Scott, 2009).

### 3.2 Willingness to communicate and motivation

Student’s willingness to communicate (WTC) results from three strands of factors: classroom environment, mutual dependence among individual features and linguistic factors, but most importantly it is the result of the interrelationship between these (Yiqian, 2013). Furthermore, the WTC in L2 requires the students to be ready to enter the L2 discourse with the intention to communicate with a specific person or persons which is different from a situation where the student is bound to respond to being called on by the teacher (Yiqian, 2013).

A similar study was done by Pae (2008) on motivation and English achievement among young L2 learners in South Korea. The author recognizes the importance of the students being exposed to authentic use of English rather than the traditional grammar translation teaching method. In this study, Pae (2008) has come to the conclusion that L2 achievement depends on several factors and emphasises self-confidence and language learning attitudes as important factors in L2 achievement.

The motivation to learn English is generally at its highest when the students are 6-7 years old and decreases significantly when they are 11-12 years old. Therefore it is crucial to
maintain and strengthen their motivation to learn foreign languages when it is at its peak in order to found a life-long interest for languages (Lundberg, 2011).

3.3 The use of L1

Teachers are likely to use the L1 for functions such as giving instructions and management purposes according to Ellis (2012), who nevertheless proposes that they are committed to using the target language as much as possible. The students are allowed to use the L1, but are expected to, over time, switch to using the L2 more and more. Correspondingly, Cook (2001) also acknowledges the general assumption that using the L1 in the classroom is discouraged and should be minimized. However, Cook (2001) is critical towards this and suggests that dismissing the L1 lessens the possibilities for language teaching and argues that compound bilingualism lets the students link L2 to the L1 and will help them develop “code-switching” since L1 and L2 are used simultaneously.

The social part of learning and the value of students discussing meaning with their classmates are taken into account, and Cook (2001) suggests the importance of using the L1 when concepts are important, when students are distracted or when the teacher praises or reprimands a student. In the same way as Cook (2001) argues the utility of using the L1 while learning the L2, Ontario Education (2005) encourages the usage of the L1 alongside the L2 and argues that this will increase the students’ sense of identity, self-confidence and support positive attitudes towards SLA as well as amend their development of L2 proficiency.

By welcoming a student’s home language, schools facilitate the flow of knowledge, ideas and feeling between home and school and across languages. (Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, and Sastri, 2005. Cited in Ontario Education, 2005).

Ontario Education (2005) argue for mixing L1 and L2, but with emphasis on the students’ sense of identity and confidence whereas Cook (2001) focuses her arguments on SLA being more efficient and substantial if the L2 education also embraces mixing in the L1. Even though their arguments vary, their conclusions correspond.

3.4 Teaching approaches and methods

A few activities that can be used in order to combine L1 and L2 in the classroom are suggested by Ontario Education (2005). For example, that students work together and then first discuss a problem in L1 before switching to English or that they help each other translate and highlight key concepts. On that same note, Cook (2001) also insists on the need for teachers to explain grammar and give instructions in the L1 and adds that when the students
learn new words, these words need to be translated, or they are unlikely to be more than words on a page with no meaning. Furthermore, Cook (2001), discusses the usage of translation as a communicative exercise which, if the students are using L1 and L2 simultaneously, can enhance linguistic awareness and show a good example of using both languages in relation to each other rather than trying to separate them and treating the students as monolinguals in either language.

However, Sundin (2001) recommends using the target language as much as possible in the classroom and refers to the curriculum, which advocates stimulating the student talk in the L2. This could be achieved through exercises such as role-play and dramatizations of authentic situations. Nevertheless, Sundin (2001) also acknowledges the profit of using activities that compare the L2 to the L1 into account in order to reinforce concepts.

Yet, Krashen (1985) has come to the conclusion that progression in SLA can be achieved by linguistic input in a natural communication, on the level just above the level on which the students are, so that the students are able to understand but have to process some parts in order to fully understand. This method in teaching creates motivation for the students to want to understand as well as giving them possibilities to learn how to use the target language in natural communicative situations (Skolinspektionen, 2010).

In the same way, Cameron (2012) suggests that when children learn a foreign language, it will help them if they see the L2 as a way to communicate and therefore the words and phrases they learn should be within a familiar context so that their social motivation and wish to communicate through the foreign language will kick in. However, it is of great importance that the teacher help the students understand. Up until 7 years or older, children seem to blame themselves if they do not understand and might not ask for more information or help to understand (Cameron, 2012).

Advocating a communicative way of teaching English as a second language, Scott and Ytreberg (2000) suggest “listen and do” activities as a way of practicing L2 in a two-way communication where the teacher easily can see if the students understand what they have been asked to do. This involves the teacher giving instructions such as “stand up, please”, “sit down, please” and so on. A variation of this exercise is “listen and draw” where the students draw what the teacher has explained instead of acting it (Cameron, 2012). Songs and rhymes are also recommended as activities in SLA by Scott and Ytreberg (2000) that let the children play around with the L2. In addition, the repetition helps expanding the student’s vocabulary.

Similarly, Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2012) emphasise the importance of contextualizing L2 and encourage visual support not only through pictures or videos, but also through body
language, gestures and social context. As well as Scott and Ytreberg (2000), Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2012) also recommend rhymes and songs in SLA and explain that there are many benefits in doing so, for example natural and fun repetition and expansion of the student’s vocabulary and pronunciation. Using songs and rhymes in SLA is motivating, builds confidence and helps develop positive attitudes towards the L2 as well as, for example, identifies intonation patterns, stressed words or syllables (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2012). Another efficient activity when teaching English to young learners is, according to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2012), constructive play and games which can result in fun, relaxed and motivating learning situations where the students practice the L2 and encourages the shy students to participate as well.

In order for the teacher to orally present English to children that are just starting to learn, Scott and Ytreberg (2000) suggest that the teacher says sentences, for example about what his/her students do in their spare time, along with the appropriate sounds and actions. The authors also suggest using a mascot or puppets that the students can direct questions and thoughts to, or on behalf of the mascot, and have a conversation in English with.

4. Discussion

In the discussion, I will contrast the different arguments against each other in order to relate the main arguments to my research questions. It seems that the general trend has changed over the last decades and new views and ideas of SLA through communication and interaction are more dominant in the education research. The “traditional” methods of teaching English, such as grammar translation methods and pointing out linguistic errors are considered old-fashioned and many argue that these methods decrease the students’ enthusiasm and motivation (Cameron, 2012; Lundberg, 2011; Pae, 2008; Scott, 2009; Yiqian, 2013). Furthermore, it seems that the general trend is to aim towards only using the target language in the classroom. However, some still argue that there are advantages in using the L1 and the L2 simultaneously and that the L1 should be embraced in the L2 classroom (Cook, 2001; Ontario Education, 2005).

4.1 Sociocultural perspective on SLA

From a sociocultural perspective with emphasis on classroom talk, communication and interaction, Vygotsky and his ideas of learning are, as mentioned above, the general
framework in this study. Therefore, I find it relevant to account for some of his basic concepts and consider those in the discussion.

Vygotsky sees the human mind as a cultural product and suggests that the experience of growing up in a human culture is necessary for successful development (Scott, 2009). Accordingly, Vygotsky proposes that in SLA, the students need to interact with others who have a little more experience and knowledge and are on the level just above theirs (Scott, 2009; Skolinspektionen, 2010). Vygotsky suggests that when children use language, they start by saying a few words that represent the meaning of a whole sentence and as they develop, they manage to break down whole thought messages into smaller units that they then can use as units of speech, i.e. the learning takes place in a social context (Cameron, 2012).

Using Vygotsky’s ideas in SLA to help the student’s scaffolding, Cameron (2012) summarizes that the teacher needs to reflect over “what next it is the child can learn; this has applications in both lesson planning and in how teachers talk to pupils minute by minute.” (Cameron, 2012, p.8).

Scott’s suggestions for SLA (2009), corresponds to Vygotsky’s theories as he advocates scaffolded dialogue and emphasises the importance of interactions where the teacher helps the students to find strategies for reasoning and help them build understanding. In the same way, Gibbons (2002) also argues that the classroom discourse and interactions are crucial to the SLA.

Along the same lines, Yiqian (2013) connects SLA with experiences, social identity and culture, and in extension, she argues that the willingness to communicate is dependent on both individual and contextual factors. It is clear that these “modern” views on SLA are very much in line with Vygotsky’s ideas and the sociocultural perspective.

### 4.2 Ban L1 or strive to mix L1 and L2?

As mentioned above, Cook (2001) and Ontario Education (2005) advocate using L1 and L2 simultaneously as much as possible for the students to develop successful code-switching, bilingualism and a co-existence of L1 and L2 rather than keeping the languages separate. These ideas are in conflict with the general trend and also with the Swedish curriculum (2011), which advocates communication in the L2.

“Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one’s thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations,
purposes and recipients.” (Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre, 2011).

If the students are invited to use the L1 as well as the L2 while approaching exercises and activities in SLA, Ontario Education (2005) suggests that this will improve the classroom environment as well as let the students reap their strengths and use their prior academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, according to Ontario Education (2005), using the L1 and the L2 simultaneously enhances the students’ self-esteem and benefits the students socially. Language skills as well as abstract knowledge can be transferred from one language to another. Hence, the L1 helps develop acquisition and proficiency in the L2 (Ontario Education, 2005).

On the contrary, Forsgren (1991) argues that language, according to the communicative language learning method, is learnt by using it and the most important thing is that the students are able to use the L2 for communication. Therefore, the learning activities should be planned in a way so that the L2 is used as much as possible (Levihn, Eyre, Forsgren, Fox & Norman, 1991).

As we have seen, communicative view on SLA is dominating in the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011), where it is stated that the students should develop an all-round communicative ability to use English in various situations. Furthermore, Skolinspektionen (2010) mentions three criteria that should be met concerning L2 input: the teacher should maximize the students’ possibilities to use English in the classroom, the teacher provides linguistic input in the L2 that is adjusted to the students’ level of understanding, and finally that the teacher uses the L2 when communicating with the students. The upshot of all this is that, in Sweden, the policy documents and curriculum clearly state that the target language should be used as much as possible and that a communicative ability is most important for the students to develop. Pae (2008) supports this in his study, where he comes to the conclusion that using L2 in a communicative manner often raises the students’ motivation. On that same note, Yiqian (2013) suggests that the students’ willingness to communicate is affected by the classroom environment and their motivation and attitudes concerning the L2.

As mentioned, L2 education in the early years needs to build the students’ confidence and should aim for the students to want to and dare to use the L2 and this is emphasised by several authors as well (e.g. Lundberg, 2011; Levihn, Eyre, Forsgren, Fox & Norman, 1991). Along those same lines, Cameron (2012) advocates the importance of the students’ participation and acknowledges that young learners often focus on the intonation and social context of the target language and pay less attention to the actual language content. To that effect, the author
is in agreement with Vygotsky’s sociocultural views on teaching and learning and bids defiance to the ideas of mixing L1 and L2 presented above (Cook, 2001; Ontario Education 2005).

The general trend where the authors are in agreement is the importance of exposing the students to the L2 in order to develop SLA. However, opinions differ when it comes to whether the usage of the L1 should be minimized or encouraged in the English classroom.

There are valid points that support both theories e.g. that the simultaneous use of both languages allows the students’ knowledge in L1 support and strengthen the development of the L2 (Ontario Education, 2005) and create links between the two (Cook, 2001). Another relevant point that supports the encouragement of using L1 alongside the L2 is that, when teachers compartmentalize the languages as separate systems they prevent the advantages of compound bilingualism (Cook, 2001, p. 407).

On the other hand, many authors and studies emphasise the importance of trying to use the target language as much as possible and argue that a communicative classroom climate where visual aids are used alongside the target language is most efficient for SLA.

4.3 Traditional translation methods or communication and interaction?

Translation between the L1 and the L2 is, according to Cook (2001), favourable for the student’s SLA. Pae (2008) however, argues against the grammar translation method and comes to the conclusion that communicative English is more important to teach the students and that, rather than translating, the students need to be exposed to meaningful and authentic use of English in order to be able to use the L2 in a meaningful way. Along the same lines, Gibbons (2002) insists that interaction is a fundamental part of the language learning process and the student’s development.

In the same way, Lundberg (2011) is critical against translation exercises, spelling glossaries and other activities where linguistic correctness is important and she argues that this could lead to that the young learners search for mistakes instead of becoming candid L2 communicators with focus on context. In fact, Lundberg (2011) insists that translation should be completely excluded from the English education in the early years as translating goes against everything SLA stands for; connecting the L2 to the world, not just to Sweden (p. 76). If the teacher uses the L1 in the L2 education, he/she deprives the students the possibilities of developing their listening comprehension and abilities to connect the language to the meaning (Lundberg, 2011). Furthermore, Lundberg (2011) argues that translating into Swedish and
thereby forcing the students to go through Swedish in order to learn English blocks the learning for the students that have another language than Swedish as L1. Instead, the author suggests replacing translations with gestures, body language, facial expressions and visual aids.

Another argument against translation exercises is that when focusing on linguistic correctness, it affects the students’ motivation negatively (Pae 2008). Gibbons (2002) also advocates communication and interaction in the L2 and explains that it is important for the students to get input and be exposed to the target language. However, it is critical for the students’ language development, that they give output in the target language as well. When they themselves produce sentences in the target language they also improve their fluent proficiency and grammatical accuracy (Gibbons, 2002).

As mentioned above, Lundberg (2011) argues against translation in SLA and, in addition, she also warns about vocabulary lists that are frequently used in L2 education. She explains that learning isolated words with focus on the Swedish translation and spelling of the word will not benefit the students in the early years as they need to develop their natural oral language skills and, in addition, vocabulary lists and sticking to the textbook is often considered difficult and boring to many students. (Lundberg, 2011, p. 109).

I have discussed the different opinions concerning the translation method, which Cook (2001) describes as “a communicative exercise to convey in one language what has been expressed in another.” (Cook, 2001, p. 417). She proclaims that there are no inherent reasons not to use the translation method and argues that this method raises linguistic awareness and pride in bilingualism. In addition, she advocates that this builds bridges between the two languages and instead of treating the students as monolinguals in two languages; they develop code-switching and bilingualism (Cook, 2001). Other authors (Lundberg, 2011; Pae, 2008), on the contrary, discard translation methods in SLA and label these methods as old-fashioned, traditional and formal. In addition, Pae (2008) is convinced that the traditional way of teaching English, where the teacher is a kind of “language-police”, decreases the students’ motivation and that interactive and communicative methods are to prefer.

The authors are in agreement that correcting linguistic errors prevents the students’ development and decreases their motivation and self-confidence. Even Cook (2001), who speaks highly of the translation method, points out that using translation as “linguistic detective work” is the major problem with this method. This statement conflicts with arguments presented above as I find myself under the impression that, using translation
methods and vocabulary lists has the purpose of practicing grammar and spelling on a detailed linguistic level.

5. Conclusion

Here follows a summary of the conclusions of this literary review where the most relevant similarities and differences are pointed out. This will be followed by suggestions for development aspects, based on the literature and research in this study that could be used in English education in Sweden. Furthermore, there are aspects within this area that would be interesting and relevant to research further and do empirical studies on in order to gain deeper understanding of the issues.

5.1 Banning or embracing L1 in the L2 classroom

As mentioned above, it is stated in the curriculum that the teachers are obliged to use the target language as much as possible in communication with the students and, in addition, that the teacher should strive to encourage students to use L2 as much as possible. Furthermore, in order to maximize SLA and help the students’ communicative abilities, the classroom environment plays an important part and leads to willingness to communicate and higher motivation, which in turn improve SLA. The general trend is that translation exercises are “out-of-date” and visual aids, face-expressions and intonation alongside communicative usage of the target language help the student’s motivation and development in SLA.

5.2 Teaching methods for SLA

As mentioned above, it appears that most of the literature in this study, including the curriculum, advocates maximizing the use of L2 in the ESL classroom, but some of the authors also take into account that when teaching English to young learners, it is important that they understand and find meaning in the activities and communication. Teaching methods that involve visual aids, songs and rhymes, games, gestures and body language to help the students understand are therefore suggested. Through these, the students receive a visual explanation instead of translation in the L1. This sits well with my conclusion, e.g. that maximum exposure of the L2 is to prefer. Involving the students so that they are active L2 learners, not just listeners will help the students’ motivation and increase their SLA and achievements. Furthermore, avoiding translation exercises and vocabulary lists will help the
students to develop their communicative skills, even though some authors are still convinced that these can be used in a communicative way.

5.3 Development opportunities

Many Swedish people are nervous and insecure about speaking English and are afraid of making mistakes, and consequently this applies to teachers as well (Lundberg 2011). Lundberg (2011) connects this fact to the traditional English education that today’s teachers experienced when they were young, where the English teacher would point out language errors and mistakes that decrease many students’ self-confidence and willingness to communicate. This could be an explanation why so many teachers are uncomfortable speaking English even while teaching it (Lundberg 2011). This corresponds to my own experience during my practice and substitute periods; that the teachers are reluctant to communicate in the L2 and often put on a film clip in English instead.

Lundberg (2011) suggests that the teachers who are reluctant to use English should consider further education. My own view is much in line with Lundberg’s and partially falls outside the scope of this investigation but has been strengthened based on the material contrasted in this study. I think it is relevant and important to lift this problem as English is one of the core subjects and it is becoming more and more important for us to be able to communicate in English. We move around a lot more these days and internet usage is a big part of most of our lives so ultimately, being able to communicate in English opens a lot of doors and possibilities. In my opinion, we need to take advantage of the knowledge in L2 that our teachers do have but might not have the confidence to use. Lundberg’s suggestion above (2011), to further educate the teachers could be a good way of improving the communicative SLA.

5.4 Further studies on the subject

The debate concerning the usage of L1 and L2 in the English classroom has been ongoing during the last three decades and in the curriculum it is stated that the target language is to be used as much as possible in a communicative way. However, there are very few studies done on classroom talk and SLA in the early years, which is something I would request. Empirical studies investigating spoken English and communicative, interactive teaching and the effects of these on the students’ SLA would be relevant and interesting.

Many studies have been made on students learning English in the upper secondary school, e.g. studies where the students’ English education is completely held in the target language
and, in some cases, with a teacher that is a native English speaker and the results in these studies are often that this has a positive effect on the students’ SLA. I am very curious whether this could work in the early years. Furthermore, I find it relevant and necessary to research the extent of, and reasons for the teachers’ reluctance of speaking English and in addition, how to change this.
6. References and Resources


