ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Frequency, Purpose and Application of Using Amharic in Teaching English in Bahir Dar General Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT
The intent of this survey study was to assess the use of **L1** *(in this case Amharic) in the English classrooms in Bahir Dar General Elementary Schools. In the study, five grade eight English teachers and 78 grade eight students participated in the study. Data were gathered through classroom observations, questionnaires and interview. The classroom observations were recorded and transcribed. The data gathered through the questionnaires and the tape recorded lessons were analyzed using frequency and percentage, while those collected through interview and open-ended items of the questionnaires were qualitatively discussed in integration with others. The study revealed that both teachers and students have positive attitude towards the use of Amharic language in the English classroom. The study further indicated that four of the teachers (80%) and 48 students (61.5%) preferred to use Amharic 'sometimes'. But, teachers' classroom practice disclosed over-use of Amharic. Finally, it was recommended that teachers be given proper training in workshops, seminars etc. in relation to 'how', 'when', and 'what for' they should use L1 in the L2 classroom.*

ACKGROUND
Monolingual and bilingual perspectives

The issue of whether or not to use L_{1*} in the L_2 classroom has been contentious in language teaching. In monolingual approach, for example, the inclusion of L_1 in the L_2 classroom is deplorable (Tang, 2002; Frank and Sauveor, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 1986; and Krashen, as mentioned in Miles, 2004) because it is reckoned that L_2 only facilitates (Frank and Sauveor, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 1986) and maximizes exposure (Krashen, as mentioned in Miles, 2004) to the target language. The L_1 use was considered as indirect and time-consuming (Nation, 1978), an obstacle to advance the study of L_2 and thinking in the L_2 (Hilton, 1974; Nazary, 2008) and a hindrance to develop fluency in an L_2 (Kaminskiene and Kavaliauskiene, 2007; Tafesse, 1988)). This view has emerged with the introduction of the direct method around the turn of the 20th century (Harbord, 1992).

* The abbreviations L_1 and L_2 used in this paper stand for mother tongue (first language) and second language (or foreign language, respectively.

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The bilingual approach, on the other hand, advocates the inevitability of L_1 use in L_2 classrooms (Eldridge, in Harmer, 2001; Medgyes, as cited in Tang, 2002). Proponents of this approach contend that the prohibition of the L_1 is a disapproval of its value and a relegation to low standard. This contention of the L_1 may result in complex psychological problems upon learners (Tang, 2002); and its exclusion to increase exposure to L_2 may not necessarily be productive (Miles, 2004). Although the exponents of the bilingual approach admit that exposure to L_2 is important, they contend that factors like the quality of teaching materials, trained teachers and sound methods of teaching are more important than the amount of exposure (Phillipson, in Miles, 2004). Hence, they claim that the exclusion of L_1 cannot be taken as surety to the effective teaching and learning of L_2.

Arguments for using L_1

As aforementioned, some experts (such as Cianflone, 2009; Grim, 2010) argue that using only L_2 provides learners with maximum input, assuming L_1 use as detrimental to language learning. As Auerbach (1993) said, "The more students are exposed to L_2, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use L_2, they will internalize it and begin to think in L_2" (p.14).

However, other scholars contend that teachers' employment of students' L_1 has multiple advantages to students. For instance, by using the L_1, they can be endowed with comprehensible input (Krashen, in

Prondromou, 2002). Besides, it compensates teachers' weaknesses in using the L_2 (Miles, 2004). Obviously, all teachers are not native speakers. The English language proficiency of these teachers may not be very good. As a result,

pushing such teachers to depend only on English may result in unsuccessful teaching and the alienation of learners from appropriate learning settings (Phillipson, 1992; Pachler and Field, in Miles, 2004). This reality shows us that L_1 is not only necessary to help learners but also to alleviate teachers' inadequacies in the L_2. Because of its significant contributions, the rejection of the cross-lingual strategy has from time to time been questioned. Widdowson, for example, has regularly cautioned against the thoughtless abandon of translation as a technique of teaching.

The use of translation as a teaching technique has long been

viewed with suspicion by language teachers and many, of course proscribe it altogether as a matter of principle. I want to argue that translation…can be very useful pedagogic and indeed in some circumstances… the most effective means of learning (Widdowson, in Stern, 1992:281).

What is more, translation is a natural phenomenon and an inevitable part of second language acquisition even where formal classroom learning does not occur (Auerbach, 1933). In other words, learners use their first language as a strategy of studying their target language even outside the classroom. Learners will also try to examine a target language structure or lexical item through their mother tongue whether they are allowed or not (Dancheu, in Harbord, 1992). Treating the students' first language as a resource instead of as an obstacle to the target language learning will help to enhance more authentic users (Cook, 2001).

L_1 use in different methods of language teaching

The different methods of language teaching history has ever known have exhibited divergent perspectives and practices concerning the use of L_1 in an L_2 classroom. The grammar translation method, for instance, practiced bilingual approach and learners were learning predominantly through translation (Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Miles, 2004; Meyer, 2008). The direct method, however, inhibits the use of L_1. Other methods have diversified standpoints; and these varying perspectives have given way to the dichotomy of monolingual and bilingual approaches. As Nazary (2008) indicated, the students' native language has had a variety of functions nearly in all teaching methods except in Direct Method and Audiolingualism. These two methods, he vehemently criticizes, reject humanistic view of the teaching learning process.

Roles of L_1 in the L_2 Classroom

The use of L1 insures learners' emotional, cognitive and cultural development, motivates them to express their experiences, needs and feelings (Poth, 1988); and enhances their "accuracy, clarity and flexibility" (Duff, in Stern, 1992:282). Besides, it is important to give clarification upon complex grammar items, to clarify meanings of new words, to address instructions, to check comprehension and sense (Atkinson, in Harmer, 2001; Mattioli, in Nazary 2008). Harbord (1992) says it facilitates communication and the learning of L_2. Avoidance of the students' first language in the second or foreign language classroom may increase the level of anxiety; which, in turn, may result in communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation; and apprehension over academic evaluation (Horwitz et al; Maclntyre and Gardner, in Meyer, 2008; Auerbach, 1993; Meyer, 2008). In other words, the use of L_1 decreases anxiety (Auerbach, 1993; Meyer, 2008). These writers, however, warn of the negative impact of its over-use such as high dependency on L_1, and recommend using it judiciously, appropriately and selectively (See also, Hawks, 2001; Jin, 2003).

The above mentioned negative consequences force us to raise the question how much of L_1 is considered as over-use? But, there is no clear and precise answer to the question. Some scholars express their views how often it should be used in the classroom. For example, Tang (2002), Jin (2003), and Nazary (2003) say moderate and judicious use of the mother tongue is advantageous, and facilitates L_2 learning. But, the two terms 'moderate' and 'judicious' do not show the exact amount for which they stand for, and are subject to personal judgments. Atkinson (1987), however, suggests that a ratio of 5% L_1 use to about 95% L_2 may be more profitable.

Other educators suggest how over-use of L_1 can be reduced. For instance, the teacher can use it for clarification (as a supportive device) when students fail to understand his ideas told in L_2 (Tang, 2002). L_1 can also be used to introduce new vocabulary and teach abstract ideas (Reineman, in Abdul Majid and Stapa, 2006). To reduce the use of L_1, teachers need to provide students with contextual meanings of words (Doff, 1988; and Auerbach, 1993), and teach communication strategies (Williams, in Meyer, 2008). Nation (2003:6) recommends the use of "moderately challenging (manageable), graded and non-threatening tasks," and urge students to repeatedly use the L2 to reduce L_1 use.

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Empirical evidences

Despite the hot arguments experts hold in both sides, today, it seems that bilingual approach has received high attention for various reasons (Miles, 2004). For instance, one blatant truth is teachers and students have positive attitudes toward using L_1 in L_2 classrooms (Tang, 2002). Macaro, as cited in Garcia (2006) and Prondromou (2002) found that low achiever students favor L_1 than high achievers. Upton and Thompson (2001) have reported that L_1 helps learners tackle word and sentence-level problems, confirm comprehension, and predict text structure and context. Other studies indicated that teachers use L_1 to explain complex grammar items and meanings of new words, to give background information and to overcome communication difficulties and handle students' disciplinary problems (Dilin et al, as cited in Garcia, 2006; and Mohammed, 2005).

Penington, in Garcia (2006), also examined the L_1 use of eight English teachers. He found that teachers use L_1 to help learners with low language ability, low motivation and poor discipline. It was also used to alleviate teachers' inadequacies such as lack of preparation, lack of knowledge of the subject matter, inadequate proficiency and lack of interest. It was also used to explain difficult concepts, and cover lessons in time. This finding shows that L_1 is important not only to students but also to support teachers.

In Ethiopia, Tafesse (1988), for instance, studied whether or not teachers use Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia) and to what extent they use it while teaching English. The result indicated that the total discourse of teachers and students comprised 71% English and 29% Amharic.

In general, these research findings show that L_1 use facilitates the teaching-learning process of a foreign or second language. Therefore, the question whether to use L_1 or not is not helpful, a more constructive range of question is 'what for', 'when' and 'to what extent' (Prondromou, 2002) we should use it. Taking what is written above into account, it sounds beneficial to conduct research into the purpose, frequency and application of using Amharic in Teaching English in Ethiopian context. To the researchers' knowledge, there is only little or no research made on this issue in Ethiopia.

English teachers in primary and secondary schools in Ethiopia may have the assumption of using only English in English classes as many teachers in different parts of the world assume (Grim, 2010), but practically they are bilingual. The practice may indicate either the teachers lack confidence in using the L_2 or they think their students do not understand them when they use only the L_2. Regardless of the underlying cause, the effectiveness of the teaching learning may fall in jeopardy. The researchers believe that the area should be given attention to alleviate the problem and to facilitate effective English language teaching learning. This research, therefore, has riveted on assessing teachers' purpose and frequency of use of Amharic (L_1) in the teaching of English (L_2).

The research has attempted to respond to the following questions.
- How often do teachers utilize Amharic in English classrooms?
- For what purpose do teachers use Amharic in teaching English?
- How do teachers view the integration of Amharic in their English classroom?

- What do the learners think about the use of Amharic in their English classroom?

Significance of the study

As stated above, the contribution of the use of learners' mother tongue (L_1) into foreign or second language (L_2) teaching and learning is overlooked in the discussion of methodology and teacher training (Atkinson, 1978). As a result, students' L_1 is often seen as a negative feature of the L_2 classroom, and decisions about whether or not to use L_1 are amongst the most common dilemmas that teachers face in the target language classroom (Gabrielatos, 1998). The significance of this study is, therefore, to create awareness among teachers about the judicious use of L_1 in L_2 classrooms. It is also important for teacher training institutions to make aware their trainees when to incorporate L_1 in L_2 classrooms. Besides, the study may serve as a resource material to understand the extant situation, so that solutions can be found to alleviate the problem.

METHODOLOGY

The study assessed the utilization of L_1 (in this case, Amharic) in teaching English in Bahir Dar General Elementary schools. The study is, therefore, a survey research. Data were collected using observation, interview and questionnaire, and were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Population and Sample of the Study

In Bahir Dar, there are eleven general elementary schools. At primary school level, English language teaching and learning is characterized by predominance of interference of L_1 (Stern, 1992; Taylor, in Brown, 1994). English language teaching and learning in Ethiopian general elementary schools is conducted with the

integration of L_1 and L_2. But, as Stern (1992) said, it is recommendable to remain within the target language (L_2) when the grade level increases. Based on this suggestion, therefore, grade eight English teachers and students were taken to be the population of the study. There were seventeen teachers who taught English for grade eight students in all elementary schools of Bahir Dar. Of the total primary schools, three were selected as samples using lottery method.

All the five English teachers who were teaching in the selected three schools were included in the study since their number was manageable. All the teachers were diploma holders, with five and above years of experience. From the sections the five teachers teach, a section each was selected using lottery method for observation. In each of the five chosen sections, there were 42, 46, 53, 58 and 61, which totaled 260 students. From each of the five sections, 30% of the students were selected using systematic random sampling to fill the questionnaire. Every third student was selected from the total list of students of the five sections deliberately made for the purpose. Therefore, a total of 78 students responded to the questionnaire.

Instruments

The study employed observation, questionnaires and interview to collect the data.

Observation

Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), as cited in Wallace (1991) was adapted as a checklist for the classroom observation. Flanders' system consists of ten categories; seven of which refer to teacher-talk; two to pupil-talk; and one to 'silence' or 'confusion' in the class. The

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researchers adapted teachers' categories of lecturing, giving direction, giving meanings of words, explaining complex concepts, clarifying complex grammar items, clearing instructions and managing classroom discipline. The other category which is related to asking questions was adapted as checking comprehension. Two classroom observations were conducted to pilot the instrument, and employed it after realizing that it suits the purpose. Besides the adapted FIAC, a seven-item checklist was used to record various purposes of using Amharic (L_1) in teaching English (L_2). The subjects' English and Amharic utterances were counted to see the frequency of use. In this study, the word count teachers used was taken as utterance-count. In other words, utterance means each word the teachers produced while teaching English.

Questionnaires
The other instruments were teachers' and students' open-ended and close-ended questionnaires. Both of the questionnaires were adapted from Tang (2002) and Schweer's (1999).The students' questionnaire was translated into Amharic to help them understand the items. Before the researchers distributed the students' questionnaire, two experts in translation have given comments on the translated version; and they were incorporated in the final version.

Interview
Unstructured interview questions (which are assumed to provide the researchers with in-depth information) were prepared for both teachers and students to substantiate the data gathered through observation and questionnaire. The teachers' interview questions included five items, while the students' contained three items. Students' interview questions were conducted in Amharic to avoid linguistic barrier. Only

two students from each section were selected randomly for the interview to make the number manageable.

Data collection and analyses procedure
Observations were made twice in each selected section, and, similar to the interview, they were recorded using a tape-recorder. The recordings were conducted to see how frequently and for what purposes the teachers used Amharic in their classes. A period covered 40 minutes, but the recording time ranged from 22 to 33 minutes because the recording was interrupted during silent reading and when there was silence.

The data obtained through observations were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. First, the recorded data, with the exception of few utterances which were inaudible, were transcribed. Then, the total number of words produced by teachers was counted and divided into English and Amharic. Next, the percentage share of both English and Amharic were calculated. Furthermore, the total number of Amharic discourse was subdivided into different events of using Amharic. Then, the number of Amharic used in each special event was expressed in percentage. Similarly, the teachers' and students' questionnaires data were indicated in percentage. The interview results, however, were analyzed qualitatively. Finally, these observation data, teachers' and students' responses to the questionnaires and the interview responses were analyzed in integration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS
Analysis of classroom observation results

In the observed classes, teachers were teaching either grammar, reading or

speaking lessons. The data of classroom observations were summarized and displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 encapsulates the frequency of Amharic use in the lessons taught by the observed teachers. From table1, we can notice that Amharic utterances (words) were used 2048 times in all the observations. This number amounted to 22.3% of the total utterances of all the teachers; there does not seem to be direct relationship between the duration of recording and the frequency of the use of Amharic. For example, teacher T who was recorded for 24 minutes in observation two used 472 Amharic utterances. But, teacher A who was recorded for 31 minutes in observation one used 151 Amharic words (See table 1).

Table 1: Classification of teachers' utterances into English and Amharic

Teacher	No of observation	Duration of recording (minutes)	Total no of words produced	English		Amharic		Average use of Amharic
				Words	Percent	words	Percent	
T	1	33	1243	672	54.1	571	45.9	
	2	24	936	464	49.6	472	50.4	47.87%
A	1	31	746	595	79.8	151	20.2	
	2	26	1097	871	79.4	226	20.6	20.46%
Y	1	22	971	830	85.5	141	14.5	17.04%
	2	25	889	713	80.2	176	19.8	
M	1	24	737	693	94	44	6	
	2	28	1171	958	81.8	213	18.2	13.47%
K	1	27	709	709	100	-	-	
	2	25	685	631	92.1	54	7.9	3.87%
Total			**9184**	**7136**	**77. 7**	**2048**	**22. 3**	

On individual basis, Amharic was most frequently used by teacher T 1043 times which was 47.87% of his total utterances, and least frequently by teacher K 54 times which was 3.87% of her total utterances. The other teachers A, Y and M used 20.46%, 17.04% and 13.47 % of Amharic in their total utterances in that order.

No matter how different the frequency was, it was possible to conclude that all the teachers used their learners' L_1 (Amharic) in teaching English. This result goes in conformity with the teachers' and students' questionnaire and interview responses. All the five teachers (100%) agreed upon the use of Amharic in teaching English (See table 3) with which all the students' responses concurred (See Table 7). The results also acceded with the teachers in their interview responses.

On the other hand, conflicting results were arrived at between the observation and the questionnaire results given to item number 5 (See Table 5). For this item, all the teachers responded that Amharic should cover 5-10% of the total utterances. The observation result, however, revealed that teachers used 47.87% (Teacher T), 20.46%

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(Teacher A), 17.04% (Teacher Y) and 13.47% (Teacher M) (See Table 1). This indicated that the classroom realities and what the teachers thought were different. Unlike the others, teacher K used only 3.07% Amharic utterances; and this matches with the suggested amount of utterances (Atkinson, 1987). In response to the interview question, teacher K said, "Translating word by word is very bad; I dislike it"; and in practice, she, compared with others, has used only few Amharic words.

Table 2. Classification of teachers' Amharic utterances in to different purposes

Teachers	Observation	Duration of recording (minute)	Total number of Amharic utterances	Occasions on which Amharic was used														
				Giving instruction and order		Explaining ideas		Checking for comprehension		Explain meanings of words		To show acceptance		Managing discipline		Explaining grammar	
				Words	%	Words	%	Words	%	Words	%	Words	%	Words	%	Words	%
T	1	33	571	137	23.9	243	42.6	21	3.7	138	24.2	8	1.4	24	4.2	-	-
	2	24	472	184	39	172	36.4	28	5.9	32	6.8	10	2.1	46	9.7	-	-
A	1	31	151	31	20.5	67	44.4	34	22.5	11	7.3	3	2	5	3.3	-	-
	2	26	226	19	8.4	35	15.5	29	12.8	4	1.8	3	1.3	13	5.8	123	54.4
Y	1	22	141	26	18.4	80	56.7	17	12.1	2	1.4	2	1.4	14	9.9	-	-
	2	25	176	38	21.6	90	51.1	27	15.3	2	1.1	5	2.8	14	8	-	-
M	1	24	44	9	20.5	-	-	21	47.7	-	-	10	22.7	4	9.1	-	-
	2	28	213	30	14.1	107	50.2	57	26.8	-	-	16	7.5	3	1.4	-	-
K	1	27	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2	25	54	24	44.4	16	29.6	14	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		265	2048	498 24.3		810	39.59.2	248	12.5	189	57	2.9	123	6	123	6		

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Table 2 divulges that Amharic was utilized to clarify instructions, to explain ideas, to give meanings of words and to explain grammar items. It was also applied to check comprehension, to manage classroom disciplines and to accept students' ideas. The teachers used Amharic 810 times to explain ideas or concepts. On the other hand, the teachers used Amharic least 57 times to express teachers' agreement (saying *yes* or *ok)* with the learners' ideas. The Table also shows that teachers used Amharic in different frequencies for various purposes. Moreover, the teachers were observed using Amharic in similar ways but with different frequencies. Except teacher K, the rest used Amharic without primarily trying meta-explanation.

When the data were analyzed further on individual level, teacher T used 571 and 472 Amharic words in observations one and two, respectively. In both observations, the teacher used the highest frequency of Amharic (42.6% and 36.4%) to explain concepts. He used Amharic sporadically while he agreed to the students' suggestions saying *Yes* and *Ok* (1.4% and 2.1% in observations one and two, respectively). The observation, however, disproved the teacher's response to the interview. During the interview, he said: "Direct translation is bad. I use real objects…." Despite his claim, Teacher T used Amharic more frequently than the other teachers observed.

Teacher A used 151 and 226 Amharic words in observations one and two. She was the second highest user of Amharic among the recorded teachers. This evidence matches with teachers' responses to item 3 of the questionnaire (See Table 4): all the five teachers (100%) responded that they use Amharic to explain concepts. 89% of

students also indicated in their questionnaire response that Amharic should be used to explain complex concepts (See Table 7).

In observation two, teacher A also used 123 (54.4% of the total) Amharic utterances to explain grammar items (See Table 2). As it is shown in the Table, teacher A was the only teacher who utilized Amharic to explain grammar items. Like teacher A teacher K also taught a grammar lesson, but she didn't use Amharic. The other teachers, however, did not teach grammar as a lesson during the time of observations. Teacher A also used 2% and 1.3% Amharic utterances during the two observations to show her agreement (saying *yes, ok)* with what the students responded.

Teacher Y also used 141 and 176 Amharic words in observations one and two, respectively. He was the third highest in using Amharic among the observed teachers. He used Amharic 80 times (56.7%) and 90 times (51%) of his total Amharic utterances during observations one and two to explain ideas. The high quantity of Amharic use to explain ideas among the teachers was also reflected in the responses given to item 3 of the questionnaire (Table 4). Similarly, teachers M, A and T articulated in the interview that they use Amharic to make concepts clear.

Teacher Y gave Amharic equivalent to words such as *ability, rumor, youth, sex, fateful,* etc. rather than attempting meta-explanation. Compared to others, teacher Y used the highest amount of Amharic (9.9% and 8% in observations one and two) to manage disciplinary problems. Some students' disruptive behavior might have compelled him to use Amharic to express his emotions. During the observation, the researcher realized that there were some rowdy students in the class. For example,

few were talking to each other and others were moving here and there while the teacher was writing on the blackboard. This finding is in conformity with the teachers' responses to the questionnaire which uncovered that they use Amharic to address disciplinary problems (See Table 4).

Teacher M used 44 and 213 Amharic utterances in observations one and two. He used 47.7% and 26.8% of his Amharic total utterances for comprehension. This was the highest use of Amharic compared to others who used it for this purpose. The teacher also used 22.7% and 7.5% of his total Amharic utterances to show his agreement to students' ideas. This was also the highest amount of use of Amharic compared to others'.

Teacher K was an exceptional teacher in relation to the frequency of using Amharic. She did not use any Amharic word in the first observation. During the second observation, however, she used a total of 54 (about 3. 07% of her total utterances) Amharic words which were the least compared to the number the other teachers did. She used Amharic to give clear instructions (44.4%), to explain ideas (29.6%) and to check for comprehension (26%). Her use of Amharic was consistent with the amount Atkinson (1987) suggested.

Atkinson recommended the use of the mother tongue not to exceed 5% of the total language use in the classroom. Teacher K was the only teacher who did not use Amharic to address disciplinary problems.

To put it in a nutshell, the subjects employed their students' mother tongue (Amharic) while teaching English for different purposes at varying degrees.

Analysis of teachers' questionnaire

The results of teachers' questionnaire on the use of Amharic in the English classroom are summarized in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6.

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Table 3. Teachers' preference and their reasons of using Amharic in the classroom.

No	Item's stem and options	No of respondents	%
1	In your opinion, should Amharic be used in the classroom?		
	a. Yes	5	100
	b. No	0	0
2	If 'Yes' why do you think is the use of Amharic important? (You can choose as many alternatives as you think is appropriate)		
	a. It aids comprehension greatly	1	20
	b. It is more effective than using only English	3	60
	c. It is less time consuming than explaining only in English	3	60
	d. It helps students become more comfortable and confident	0	0
	e. It facilitates teacher-students interaction	5	100
	f. It reduces language anxiety	0	0
	g. To overcome communication difficulties	5	100

Note: participants chose more than one answer, total add up to more than 100%.

Table 3 shows that all the 5 teachers (100%) who participated in the study think that Amharic should be used in the classroom (item 1). All of them (100 %) again indicated that Amharic is necessary to facilitate interaction between teacher and students and to overcome communication difficulties.

In addition, "Amharic is more effective than using only English", and "it is less time consuming than explaining only in English" were the next teachers' priorities (60% each). Lastly, one (20%) of the participants indicated that Amharic is "important to aid comprehension greatly." Concerning the responses given to items 1 and 2, teachers support the inclusion of

Amharic; and they expressed its various roles in language teaching in the interview responses. It is also possible to deduce similar ideas from the observation result (Table 2).

Table 4. Teachers' opinion on the major pedagogic purposes that Amharic should be used for.

Item No	Item stem and options	No of respondents	%
3	When do you think is appropriate to use Amharic in English classes? (You can choose more than one option)		
	a. To explain difficult concepts	5	100
	b. To clarify instructions	4	80
	c. To define new vocabulary items	5	100
	d. To explain difficult grammar items	4	80
	e. To maintain disciplinary problems	3	60
	f. To check for comprehension	2	40

Note: participants chose more than one answer, total add up to more than 100%.

According to the data in Table 4, all the 5 teachers seem to be attracted more to the pedagogic roles of mother tongue (L₁) such as explaining difficult concepts and defining new vocabulary items (100%) each. As practically shown, teachers used 39.6% of their Amharic utterances to explain complex concepts (See Table 2).

Next, 4 teachers (80%) believed that the use of Amharic is important to clarify instructions and complex grammar items. Similarly, the observation result shows that teachers used 24.3% and 6% of their Amharic utterances to provide clear instructions and to explain grammar items, respectively (Table 2). Some of the teachers also indicated that the use of Amharic is necessary to alleviate classroom disciplinary problems (60%) and to check for comprehension (40%). In relation to this, see the observation result (Table, 2)

Table 5. Teachers' views on frequency and amount of Amharic use in the classroom.

Item No	Item's stem and options	No of respondents	%
	How often do you think Amharic should be used in the classroom?		
	a. frequently	0	0
4	b. some times	4	80
	c. very rarely	1	20
	d. never	0	0
	In your opinion, what percent of the total utterance should be Amharic?		
	a. 5-10%	5	100
5	b. 10-20%	0	0
	c. 20-30%	0	0
	d. 30-40%	0	0
	e. 50%	0	0

In response to item4, 4 of the teachers (80%) believed that Amharic should be used 'some times' in the classroom. Similarly, teachers responded the 'sometimes' use of Amharic in the classroom in the interview question. In relation to this, 61.5% of the students also indicated that they preferred the 'sometimes' use of Amharic (Table 7), but one teacher (20%) of the participants preferred its 'very rare' use. Similarly, the minority (16.7%) of the students preferred the 'very rare' use of Amharic (Table 7). Item 5 clearly specifies the amount of Amharic which should be used in the classroom. To this item, all the five teachers (100%) preferred 5-10% of Amharic use in a period. But, as it is clearly addressed in the observation data (Table 1), all the teachers except teacher K used more than what they indicated here to item 5 (Table 1).

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Table 6. Teachers' views regarding whether or not the use of Amharic has any limitation in the classroom.

Item No.	Item stem and options	No. of respondents	%
6	Do you think of any limitation of using Amharic in English classroom?		
	a. Yes	**5**	**100**
	b. No	**0**	**0**
7	If your answer is 'yes' to questions number '6' please write here what the limitations are --	**0**	**0**

Table 6 summarized teachers' views whether the use of Amharic has any limitation or not. All of them believe that the use of Amharic (L_1) might have limitation in language teaching and learning. Their responses to the open-ended item disclosed that over-use of Amharic (L_1) exposes learners to be dependent on it; and this might not help them scale up their language skills. The teachers also clearly expressed the problem of over-use of mother tongue (Amharic) in the interview response. For example teacher A said, "If we always use Amharic, they (students) do not develop the second language; they always expect translation." Similarly, students' interview responses also attested that over-use of Amharic (L_1) might be an obstacle to improve their English (L_2).

Analysis of students' questionnaire

Table 7. Students' responses questionnaire items

Item No	Item stem and options	No. of respondents	%
1	Do you want your English teacher to use Amharic in English class?		
	a. Yes, I do.	78	100
	b. No, I don't.	--	--
2	If your response is 'Yes' to the above question, how frequent do you think it should be?		
	a. frequently	11	14.10
	b. sometimes	50	64.10
	c. rarely	17	21.79
3	When do you think it is appropriate to use Amharic in English classes? (You can choose more than one option)		
	a. To explain complex grammar	52	66.67
	b. To define new vocabulary items	78	100
	c. To explain difficult concepts	63	80.76
	d. To clarify instructions	34	43.59
	e. If there are other things you want to add, please write them here.		
	--		
4	Do you think using Amharic in English class has a problem?		
	a. Yes	26	33.33
	b. No.	52	66.67
5	If your answer to the above question is 'Yes', what do you think are the problems?		
	--		

Note: participants chose more than one answer, total add up to more than 100%.

Table 7 summarizes the preference of students in the use of Amharic in teaching English. According to their responses to item 1, all the participants (100%) like their teachers to use Amharic in teaching English. The majority (64.10%) favored the use of Amharic 'sometimes', while only 14.10% supported its 'frequent' use. 21.79% of the participants said it should be used very rarely.

In response to the causes for using Amharic in English classes, all the respondents conceded that it is important to explain meanings of words; 66.67% believed that it is indispensable to explain complex grammar items; 80.76% and 43.59 % also assumed that it is important to explain complex concepts and to provide clear instructions, respectively. 33.33% considered the use of Amharic to have some problems; while 66.67% of them saw it positively. Those who have assumed using Amharic has problems have said that it, if overused, might result in lose of confidence among students to use English; and might also be an impediment to improve their English language skills.

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DISCUSSION

The results of this study on the use of mother tongue (in this case Amharic) in teaching English exhibit similarities with Tafesse's (1988) and Tang's (2002) studies which were conducted in Ethiopia and China, respectively. The studies show that mother tongue was used by the teachers studied, and both teachers and students responded positively towards its use. Similarly, in this study all respondent teachers and students showed a positive attitude towards using Amharic in English classroom.

The teachers participating in this study indicated the various purposes of using mother tongue in the classroom: to explain difficult concepts, to define new vocabulary items and to explain complex grammar items. They also added that it is essential to clarify instructions, to check for comprehension and to manage disciplinary problems. Similarly, the classroom observation result indicated that Amharic was used for these purposes. All these concur with what Atkinson (in Harmer, 2001; and Mattioli, in Nazary, 2008) said regarding the roles of L_1 in an L_2 classroom. From this result, we can say that teachers are aware of the various roles of L_1 in the L_2 classroom.

The result of the study also revealed the amount of Amharic used in the classroom. As it is vividly expressed in table 1, teachers used Amharic in different frequencies even though they teach similar lessons. To illustrate, teachers T, A, Y, M and K used 47.87%, 20.46%, 17.04%, 13.47 and 3.87% used Amharic utterances, respectively. Except teacher K, the other teachers' use of L_1 is much more than what can be tolerated as experts, such as Atkinson (1987), in an L_2 teaching suggest. Atkinson (1987), for example, recommends the use of 5% L_1 and 95% L_2

use at early levels to enhance language learning. As this study was made in the upper level of the primary education, seeing it against the suggestion forwarded by Atkinson, it is possible to conclude that the teachers in this study, except one of them, have over-used L_1 (Amharic) in an (English) class. This, as Atkinson has attested, may have a detrimental effect on students' use of the target language. Grains and Redman (1986:76) also express the problem of over-use of L1 as: "if teachers rely too heavily on the use of translation ... their students are quickly losing sense of the essential sprit and atmosphere of being in a language classroom." L_1 can enhance language learning if it is used judiciously and only sometimes (Atkinson, 1987), as teacher K did in this study. Otherwise, depending heavily on L_1 in an L_2 classroom badly affects the development of the communicative skills of students in the L_2.

As indicated above, teacher T used the highest frequency of Amharic. The teacher also committed a lot of errors in English in both observations. His over-use of L_1, therefore, might be to compensate his inadequacies in the L_2. Regarding this, Pennington, in Garcia (2006), has attested that teachers' over-use of students' L_1 is to redress their deficiency in the L_2 and knowledge of the subject matter. And this practice retards the progress of students in learning the L_2 (that is English).

The other finding was related to how teachers utilized Amharic in teaching English. Except for teacher K, the rest were observed while giving direct translations to different language items. This is divergent from what Doff (1988) and Auerbach (1993) recommended that teachers should avoid direct translation since it makes students fail to understand how the word is used in an English sentence. According to these experts, it is advisable to use L_1 for

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clarification purpose after an attempt has been made to communicate ideas in L_2 and students still appear to be confused (Tang,2002). Had the teachers in this study used Amharic for clarification purpose after trying to communicate in English, the frequency of Amharic used would have been reduced.

In general, the result shows that teachers seem to be familiar with the various roles of L_1 in the L_2 classroom; however, it seems they did not apply it properly. As a result, the frequencies of Amharic used have become more than what experts such as Miles (2004) have suggested. This might have resulted from teachers' low level of

English language proficiency and lack of training about when to use the L_1 (Atkinson, 1987)

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it may be possible to conclude that both English teachers and students favored the use of Amharic (L_1) in English (L2) classes for different purposes; however, teachers in the target schools over-use Amharic (L_1). They tend to translate before they attempt to use the target language, English (L_2). This practice negatively contributes to the English language proficiency development of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings and the conclusions made, the following recommendations were forwarded. First, teachers should be given proper training in colleges and universities, as well as workshops, seminars, etc. by education bureaus and the Ministry of Education on

the role of the mother tongue (L_1) in the EFL classroom. Second, teachers should give priority to meta-explanations by incorporating different techniques such as using gestures, facial expressions, pictures, etc. to help learners understand ideas, concepts, etc. Amharic (L_1) should be used as a final resort when students fail to understand the meta-explanations. In other words, teachers need to identify when translations may be desirable, and employ them judiciously. Finally, teachers' frequent use of mother tongue may also be attributed to their lack of knowledge of the target language (L_1). Therefore, teachers should be given training opportunities to upgrade their facility in the target language.

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