Exploring L1 use in English as Foreign Language Classrooms through Activity theory

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Abstract

This study attempts to examine the amounts, purposes, and reasons for using L1 by teachers as well as the amounts and purposes of its use by students in English as foreign language classrooms through investigating two pre-intermediate classes of an English language institute in Iran. Among students with an age range of 16-25 years, eight male and female students were in one class and 16 were in the other class (N = 24). Two native Persian teachers with master's degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language participated in this study: One was 40 years old with 14 years of experience and the other one was 32 years old with nine years of experience. Eight 90-minute sessions of each teacher's class were audio-recorded. Following that, the two teachers were interviewed to report on the reasons for which they used their first language. The findings obtained from the classroom audio transcriptions were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches through the lens of Activity Theory. Moreover, the teachers' interviews were thematically analyzed and the results of these analyses indicated that the teachers and their students resorted to the first language as an important cognitive and pedagogical tool on different occasions wherever needed during their teaching. The findings also revealed that teachers in this study maintained that using the students' first language supports second/foreign language learning and teaching processes in the pre-intermediate levels.

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We have seen a growing interest in learning English as a second or foreign language (L2/FL) for a few decades around the globe (Richards, 2015). Among the many factors affecting the process of L2/FL learning such as curriculum, teachers' experience and instructional methods, learners' age, personality, aptitude, motivation, and their native language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), the issue of L1 use in L2/FL instruction has been permanently debated over the past decades. Bearing this assumption in mind that some aspects of L1 may transfer into L2 (Liu, 2007, as cited in Rahimi Domakani, Hashemian & Mansoori, 2013), there have always been new ideas and theories recommending that L2 instruction be mainly through the Target Language (TL) and L1 must be minimized as much as possible (Turnbull, 2001), but its judicious use in L2/FL instruction has recently been allowed and encouraged (Cook, 2001). In the last two decades, strong theoretical arguments referring to the facilitative role of L1 use in the L2/FL contexts have been posed and validated by numerous studies (e.g., Ford, 2009; Gulzar, 2010; Lin, 2013; Macaro, 2009; Machaal, 2012). These studies argue that L1 might be used for various purposes such as giving instructions, explaining grammar, conveying meaning (Mart, 2013), testing strategies, analyzing language, discussing cross-cultural issues, managing classroom, alleviating affective filter, providing comprehensible input, increasing language proficiency (Thongwichit, 2013), improving cognition, communication and social relations (McMillan & Rivers, 2011), benefiting L2/FL learners and facilitating their learning process. Despite the existence of various parallel studies on the use of L1 in EFL classes, it would be beneficial to further our understanding of the issue through the lens of AT in this current study because

AT provides a useful perspective to understand the mutual and influential nature of learning as a social-embedded activity. This study examined the use of L1 in two pre-intermediate EFL classes in Iran to find out to what extent and for what purposes the teachers and their students used Farsi as their L1 in EFL classrooms. Besides, it tried to reveal the reasons for which the teachers used L1 in teaching EFL.

Literature Review

The importance of L1 use hardly escapes from the attention of both researchers in bilingualism and bilingual teachers in the classroom. As remarked by Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008), the debate over the use or non-use of L1 goes back to the 1980s when the exclusive use of the target language was questioned for the first time at the end of the 20th century. Since then, a growing number of researchers have begun to question the inclusion of the L1 in the classroom syllabi and to discover whether L1 must be included or not (e.g., Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Turnbull, 2001). Therefore, many studies have recently focused on the optimal amount of L1 use in the L2/FL classroom (e.g., Lin, 2013; Macaro, 2009) and emphasized that the success of the L2 instruction process is bound to the adequate amount of L1 inclusion in L2 classroom syllabi (Lin, 2013). However, the debate is over whether to follow the monolingual approach or the bilingual one. The advocators of the exclusive use of L2 believe that L1 hampers the process of L2 learning while the opponents of the TL-only approach suggest that L1 must be used in the classroom to make the instruction successful (Chalipa, 2015). Although several researchers (e.g. Gutherie, 1987; Macaro, 2001) reported a high level of L2 use by teachers and students, others (e.g., Kim & Elder, 2005; Gulzar, 2010) were in favor of L1 use in the L2/FL contexts. Therefore, aligned with those advocating studies, to justify the use of L1 in the L2 classrooms and to

serve the purpose of the present study focusing on teachers' and students' amounts and purposes of L1 use by teachers and students in two Iranian EFL classrooms, the researchers tried to focus on justifications of the theoretical background and previous research supporting the use of L1 in L2/FL contexts.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background, with its concepts of scaffolding, semiotic mediation, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is rooted in Vygotsky's (1933) Sociocultural Theory (SCT) which views the human mind as mediated by physical and symbolic tools, their knowledge as socioculturally mediated, and their activities as mediated by subject-object interactions (Fujioka, 2014). SCT mediates cognition and learning and views them as complex social practices embedded within cultural and historical contexts that support students' L1 use in the L2 classrooms (Ford, 2009). It argues that instruction is a requirement of L2/FL learning and it should be geared to the ZPD, that is, beyond the learner's actual development level. Vygotsky (1933) believed that good instruction must create a ZPD, which develops the individual's cognitive processes as a result of interaction with people in the environment and in cooperation with others. He also believed that learning in an L2 context should be a collaborative achievement and not an isolated individual's effort where the learner works unassisted and unmediated. While Vygotsky's (1933) SCT concerns the development of the individual, Activity theory (AT), which is a subcategory of SCT and the analytical framework of this study, focuses on collective activity and individual action discriminately and investigates their relationship in social and cultural contexts (Engeström et al., 1999).

AT is a theoretical framework for analyzing human interaction through using tools and artifacts. It seeks to understand human activities as complex,

socially situated phenomena and provides a holistic and contextualized view for qualitative research. It considers an entire work/activity system (including teams and organizations) beyond just one actor or user. It accounts for the environment, history of the person, culture, role of the artifact, motivations, and complexity of the real-life activity. One of the strengths of AT is that it bridges the gap between the individual subject and the social reality—it studies both through the mediating activity. The goal of AT is to understand the mental capabilities of a single individual. However, it rejects the isolated individual as an insufficient unit of analysis and analyzes the cultural and technical aspects of human actions (Bertelsen & Bodker, 2003). The six elements of AT include the object (objective of the activity system), subject (actors in the activities), community (social context), tools (the mediating tools or artifacts used by actors), division of labor (the hierarchical structure of the activity), and the rules (conventions and guidelines) (Engeström, 1987).

As Leontev (1987) argues, AT is believed to be directly relevant to teaching and learning because human thinking and learning are shaped by the activities of other people in a social context. Therefore, identification of the context in which activities occur is of major value. AT provides a useful perspective to understand this dialogic nature of human activities and the mutual and influential nature of learning as a social-embedded activity (Fujioka, 2014). Through this perspective, learning is seen as a multi-directional activity (Engeström et al., 1999), which is a purposeful interaction of a subject with an object through the use of tools. AT provides a method of understanding and analyzing this activity, finding patterns and making inferences across interactions, and describing and presenting it through a built-in language (Fjeld et al., 2002).

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Previous Research on L1 Use in the L2/FL Classrooms

Recent studies focus on the extent to which L1 is used in L2/FL classrooms (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Ford, 2009; White & Storch, 2008). A study was conducted with four English teachers at two private language institutes in Cyprus (Copland & Neokleous, 2011). Their transcriptions of the observed classes showed that the teachers' use of L1 served several functions, including organizing the course, giving explanations and instructions, translating, asking and answering questions, making a fun environment, managing the classroom, reducing the students' anxiety, encouraging them, giving hints and opinions to the students. They also found that students used L1 to ask questions with each other, answer the teachers' questions, do the tasks, and cooperate in groups.

Ford (2009) focused on the context of university settings in Japan. Using a semi-structured format, she interviewed 10 university teachers about their L1 use. The results of her study showed that while most of the teachers stated that they tried to follow the English-only approach, many of them used L1 consciously with the purpose of making humor, expressing empathy, creating a safe and friendly learning environment, clarifying the instructional ambiguities, supporting and scaffolding anxious students and saving time. Through a longitudinal study, White and Storch (2008) also investigated teachers' amounts and purposes of L1 use in two French FL pre-intermediate level classes at two Australian universities. Every two weeks, a native French-speaking teacher and a non-native French-speaking teacher were observed and audio-recorded over a 12-week semester. They found that the non-native teacher used more L1 (85%) than the native teacher (50%). It was also found that the L1 served a variety of purposes such as interacting with students, explaining vocabulary and grammar, managing tasks, discussing cultural points, and controlling the classroom.

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In another study, Samar and Moradkhani (2014) investigated the cognitive processes in EFL teachers' codeswitching through stimulated recall techniques, classroom video-recording, and interviews. They found that the reasons for which the teachers mostly used their L1 included students' better comprehension, checking their understanding, explaining the task at hand, comparison and contrast between L1 and L2, improving students' emotional well-being, overcome problems due to students' lack of comprehension and low proficiency level and for better efficiency. In a study, Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015) investigated six EFL teachers' and students' amount, purposes, and reasons for using L1 in pre-intermediate classrooms. The researchers used six teachers' classrooms for two sessions each through video-recordings for data collection. The findings indicated that EFL teachers used little L1 use for multiple pedagogical purposes and reasons such as contrasting between L1 and L2, asking and answering questions, scaffolding each other, translating the new vocabularies, peer learning, and achieving inter-subjectivity and teachers used L1 for conveying meaning, managing the classroom, making a friendly environment, reducing the students' anxiety, facilitating communication, elaborating on the course objectives and clarifying the ambiguous points in the pre-intermediate level to develop students' learning (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015). Owing to the extant methodological limitation like lack of adequate teacher interviews for L1 use in the previous study, the purpose of the current study using audio-recordings along with teacher interviews through the AT was to investigate two EFL teachers' and learners' amount, purposes, and reasons of L1 use for eight sessions and each session lasted about 90 minutes in pre-intermediate classrooms.

The current study differs from the research (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Ford, 2009; Samar & Moradkhani, 2014; White & Storch, 2008) described in the literature review section in terms of methodological, and theoretical lens as well as participant cohort. First, this study collected the data through both recording sessions and interviews, whereas Ford (2009), and White and Storch (2008) used either observation or interviews. Second, this study used AT as its analytical framework which is more specific as a subcategory of SCT, while Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015) used Vygotsky's SCT in their study which is more general. Third, this study examines both the teachers' and students' use of L1, whereas De la Campa and Nassaji (2009), Samar and Moradkhani (2014), and White and Storch (2008) only examined the teachers' use of L1.

Although all studies reviewed above have supported the use of L1 in L2/FL contexts using SCT as their theoretical framework, there have rarely been studies investigating this issue through the lens of AT. Given that AT provides a method of understanding and analyzing learning as a social activity (Fjeld et al., 2002) and considering the importance of L1 use as a mediating tool in L2/FL teaching and learning, the current study provides us with a new approach to study a previously-examined issue. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers and students use L1 in pre-intermediate classrooms?
2. What are the EFL teachers' and students' purposes (functions found in classroom transcripts) for using L1 in pre-intermediate classrooms?
3. What are EFL teachers' reasons (self-reported functions mentioned by the teachers themselves) for using L1 in pre-intermediate classrooms?

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Method

Participants

In an attempt to examine the amounts, purposes, and reasons for using L1 by teachers as well as the amounts and purposes of its use by students in EFL classrooms, the present study was conducted in two pre-intermediate classes of an EFL institute in Mazandaran province in Iran, where the English language is not spoken out of the classroom. A total number of 24 male and female students from 16 to 25 years old attended these two conversation classes, eight in one class and 16 in the other class. They were native speakers of Farsi and taught the four macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A 40-year-old male English language teacher with 14 years of experience taught the 16 pre-intermediate students in one class, and a 32-year-old male teacher with 9 years of experience, taught the other class with 8 pre-intermediate students. Both teachers had master's degrees in Teaching English as Foreign Language and were qualified in teaching EFL through passing a proficiency test as well as the teacher training courses. The teachers and their students were provided with adequate information on the purpose of the study and a written consent form. After gathering the consent forms regarding the voluntary participation of the teachers and students in the study, eight sessions of each teacher's class were audio-recorded and each of which lasted about 90 minutes. Although the teachers were forced to use English as the main language for teaching, they tried to be flexible enough to use appropriate techniques and tools such as L1 to meet the students' learning needs in the classroom.

Data Collection

The data in the present study comes predominantly from classroom recordings supplemented with teacher interviews through a Samsung recorder.

In particular, to achieve the aim of this study, the data were collected through 16 audio recording sessions. There was no insistence on the inclusion or exclusion of the L1 in the classroom syllabi. No quizzes or tests were administered throughout this study. Each teacher's class was recorded eight times and each time for about one and a half hours. Since the classes were held twice a week, the whole process of data collection through classroom recording lasted about four weeks. The class recordings were then transcribed, read several times carefully, and coded to find instances of the L1 use and the purposes for which they were used. In fact, recording directed us toward an understanding of what actually happened in the classrooms and helped us to discover the achievable aspects of the teachers' and students' performances (Maxwell, 2012).

As supplements to the data collection procedure, preceded by classroom recording, interviews were conducted with both teachers individually to explore their reasons for using L1 in their classrooms. Actually, according to Maxwell (2012), interviews can provide us with information lost in the recordings. In the present study, the interviews were conducted after all classroom data had been collected, coded, and analyzed in order not to influence the teachers' practice with the interview questions. The interviews were semi-structured with a set of guiding questions prepared ahead of time providing reliable, and comparable qualitative data and allowed the interviewees to express their views in their own terms. The questions covered the reasons for which the teachers used the L1 utterances highlighted for them in the classroom audio transcripts. The second researcher gave each teacher a copy of each session's transcript and highlighted the Farsi (L1) parts to make his focus on the purposes for which they used those parts. Since this process was time-consuming, each interview lasted about two hours. Although the researchers and the teachers were native speakers of Farsi, considering that

both teachers had enough proficiency in English to understand and answer the interview questions, the interviews were conducted mostly in English to prevent any possible problem in transcribing and coding processes. The transcribed data (see Appendix A) was then coded and analyzed by the researcher and to determine the teachers' purposes for L1 use. The analyses on the data were then checked by the co-author and the inter-rater reliability was calculated to be 0.97.

Table 1.

Coding Scheme of L1 Utterances

Functional Categories: Definitions	Examples
1. Translation: L1 utterances that translated a previous L2 utterance.	از دست دادن، نرسیدن. یعنی وقتی رسید به ایستگاه قطار:T رفته بود. [To lose, to miss. It means when he arrived at the bus stop, the bus had gone.]
2. L1-L2 contrast: L1 utterances used to contrast L2 forms.	کسی که سگ رو میبره بیرون تو فارسی چی صداش T: میکنیم؟ [What do we call a person who goes dog walking in Farsi?]
3. Evaluation: L1 utterances used to evaluate students' contributions.	اها!!!! این شد... البته شما هم خوب بودینا ولی اینا عالی T: بودن! [That's it!!!You did also well, but they were great!]
4. Activity instruction: L1 utterances that provided activity instructions.	حالا ببینید کدوم عبارت ها و جمله ها با این پنج تا کلمه T:جور در میان. [Now, see which phrases and clauses match these words.]
5. Activity objective: L1 utterances that described the objective of an activity.	هدف از این تمرین اینه که با کمک افعال گذشته خاطره T: نویسی رو یاد بگیرین. [This exercise attempts to teach you how to write memos using past tense of the verbs.]
6. Elicitation of student contribution: L1 utterances that elicited student contributions.	درسا حالا تو بگو من مجبور نیستم تاکسی بگیرم. باید T:جواب کامل بدی. [Dorsa, now you say I do not have to take a taxi. You must give a complete answer.]

Functional Categories: Definitions	Examples
7. Personal comment: L1 utterances that expressed the teacher's personal take on events.	T: این بخش خیلی جالبه. میخواد ببینه کی حواسش جمعه. [This section is really interesting. It checks how much you are focused.]
8. Comprehension check: L1 utterances that checked students' comprehension.	T: حالا اگه متوجه شدی بگو من مجبورم بخوابم چی میشه. [Now, if you understood, tell me what it is said I have to sleep.]
9. Classroom equipment: L1 utterances that dealt with classroom equipment.	T: بذارین کامپیوترو روشن کنم. [Let me turn on the computer.]
10. Administrative issues: L1 utterances related to administrative issues (e.g., exam announcements).	T: تکالیفتون رو بیارید. [Bring in your homework.] S: من میتونم اول بیارم؟ تقریبا همه شو نوشتم. [May I come first? I have written most of the exercises.]
11. Repetition of student L1 utterance: L1 utterances spoken by a student and repeated by the teacher.	S: پس معنیش میشه حد اقل؟ [So, it means at least?] T: حداقل. بله. [At least. Yes.]
12. Reaction to student question: L1 utterances the teacher produced in response to a student question.	T: نیما تو جدول رو بخون. [Nima, you read the table.] S: من؟ [I?] T: مگه بازم نیما داریم؟ [Do we have another Nima in the class?]
13. Humor: L1 utterances in which the teacher made a joke intended to make the students laugh.	S: تو هم سی پی یوت مشکل داره ها! [Your CPU is not working well!]

14. Teacher as bilingual: instances of code-switching
 	
a) Arbitrary code-mixing: L1 utterances
   containing instances of the teacher
   mixing L1 and L2 words randomly,
   including false starts.
	T: اگه بخوایم دعوت کسی رو رد کنیم، باید خیلی مودبانه برخورد کنیم.
	[If we want to reject somebody's invitation, we must be polite.]
	
	T: کدوپلو یه غذای محلی ما مازندرنی ها است.
	[Kadu Polo is a local food in Mazandaran.]

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Functional Categories: Definitions	Examples
b) L1 utterances from L1 culture: L1 utterances from L1 cultural context that the teacher incorporated into L2 speech.	
15. Teacher support: L1 utterances that the teachers used to support their students.	T: اخه چه جوری بگم؟ [How can I say it?] T: تو بگو من کمکت میکنم. [You start. I will help you, then.]
16. Encouragement: L1 utterances used by the teachers to encourage the students to have active participation.	اها! امیر عالی بود. بدون اجازه وارد جایی شدن. ادامه T: بده. [That was great, Amir! Enter somewhere without permission. Go on.]
17. Grammar explanation: L1 utterances that the teachers used for Clarifying on grammatical ambiguities.	از این فعل کمکی بر ای فاعل هایی که سوم شخص هستن T: استفاده میکنیم. [We use this auxiliary verb for the third person subjects.]
18. Asking for clarification: L1 utterances the students used to ask for clarification on a topic.	S: میشه دوباره بگین؟ [Would you please repeat it?]
19. Past issues: L1 utterances used to refer to the items learned before.	T: تفاوت حال ساده وو استمر اری یادتونه؟ [Do you remember the difference between simple present and present continuous?]
20. Linking back to a previous experience in L1: L1 utterances used by the teachers to link back to the students' previous experiences in L1.	T: شما شور ای دانش آموزی نداشتین تو مدرستون؟ [Didn't you have a student council in your school?]
21. Making an excuse: Students' use of L1 for making excuse.	S: اصلا حواسم نبود . اخه امتحان داشتم. [I forgot it because I had an exam.]
22. Asking for time: Students' use of L1 to ask for time to do what they are supposed.	S: یه لحظه وایستین! [Just a minute, please!]
23. Pet phrase: Short L1 utterances that the teachers and students use most frequently in their speech.	T: خوب! [Well!]

Functional Categories: Definitions	Examples
24. Asking questions: L1 utterances used by the teachers and students to ask questions.	T: نسترن، میخوای بری خونه؟ [Nastaran, do you want to go home?] S: میتونم برم؟ [May I go?]
25. Answering question: L1 utterances used by the teachers and students to answer questions.	S: میشه باز یادتون بره؟ [Is it possible for you to forget it?] T: خیالتون جمع. این دفعه یادداشت کردم. [Be sure I won't forget because I made a note of it.]

Note: S(s) stands for Student(s) and T stands for Teacher.

Data Analysis

Teachers may use numerous social and cultural tools to mediate and facilitate their teaching as well as their students' learning (Machaal, 2012). L1 use is one of these mediating tools, which plays a great role in learning, which is beyond the students' ZPD - the difference between what is already learned independently and what can be learned with the help of others. Accordingly, AT seems to be a useful and suitable theory for exploring the role of L1 in L2/FL contexts (Machaal, 2012). In order to quantify the amount of L1 used by the teachers and students, and to determine the purposes it served through the lens of AT, the researchers attempted to present the main components of EFL teaching and learning system in the investigated classrooms in Figure 1 (Engeström, 1987, p. 78).
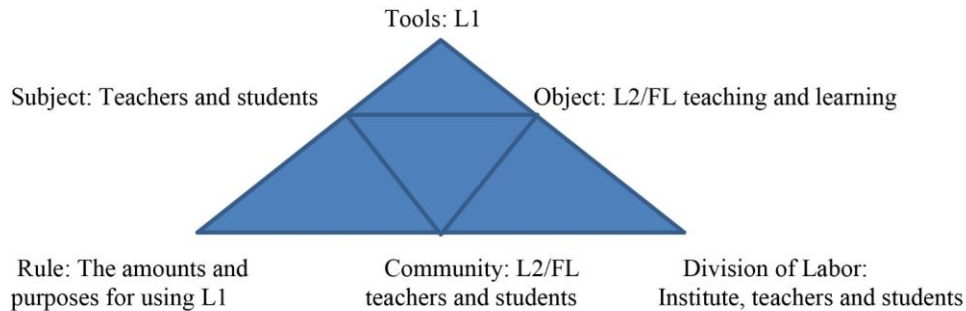
Figure 1.
L2/FL Teaching and Learning System

Quantitative analysis of L1 use

Responding to the first research question regarding the amounts of L1 use of words by the teachers and students, following Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002), the word count processor was used for counting the total number of the L1 and L2 words spoken during the 16 sessions and then the L1 utterances used in the whole sessions. After that, the numbers of the Farsi words used in each session was counted. Finally, to report the amount of L1 used by the two teachers and their students, the number of L1 utterances was calculated in each session as well as the whole sessions (see Table 2).

Qualitative analysis of L1 use

Responding to the second research question regarding the purposes the L1 served, after iterative readings, the data obtained from the classroom recordings and the teachers' interviews were analyzed. First, the classroom recordings were coded for L1 turns with one or a number of L1 utterances serving a specific purpose or issue. Then, the codes were categorized based on the coding scheme introduced by Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) and

used by De la Campa and Nassaji (2009), as well as Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015). Modifications were made afterwards to the initial coding scheme to reflect the purposes of the L1 utterances that were present in the data. It would be helpful to note that the data were first analyzed deductively, that is, the researchers used an existing coding scheme and searched the whole transcripts to find samples for those codes. Then, they tried to continue the analysis inductively by searching the whole documents for samples beyond what was in that ready-made coding scheme. They actually tried to add other functional categories to that scheme. The consequence was that the final coding scheme contained 25 functional categories from which 14 ones were in previous studies noted above. Table 1 illustrates the functional categories along with their definitions and examples.

Then, responding to the third research question, the researchers analyzed L1 use in the EFL classrooms, coded and analyzed interview data deductively and inductively. The interview questions mostly asked the teachers about their purposes and reasons for using L1. The researchers first identified all the reasons that the teachers mentioned and then categorized the similar ones under 6 general themes emerged from the pool of data. The themes obtained from the analysis of the teachers' interviews and their definitions are presented in Table 4 in the Result section.

Results

The results of the present study were obtained from a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the classroom transcriptions of the audio recordings and a thematic analysis of the teachers' interviews. To answer the first research question regarding the amount of L1 used by the teachers and students in the EFL classrooms, the word count from the transcriptions showed that the two teachers and their students used a total

number of 50,409 utterances within 16 sessions (8 sessions for each teacher) and used 6,686 L1 utterances, which is equivalent to 13.26% of the whole words uttered. Table 2 shows the number and percentages of the whole words and the L1 utterances in each session and the whole sessions of the first and second classes and reports on the total amounts used in both classes (16 sessions) as well. The minimum (4.45%) and maximum (18.3%) amounts of L1 use are also highlighted in Table 2. Although the numbers show a variable amount of L1 use in different classes due to variations in the classroom conditions, lesson contents and teachers' instructional techniques and strategies, the analysis reveals that the bulk of the data collected in this study supports the use of L1 for various purposes in EFL contexts which are the focus of the second research question.

Table 2.
Amount of L1 Use in the EFL Classrooms

Sessions	Class 1 (8 sessions)			Class 2 (8 sessions)		
	No. of Ws	No. of L1 Ws	% of L1	No. of Ws	No. of L1 Ws	% of L1
Session1	3400	553	16.26%	3650	200	5.47%
Session 2	3200	317	9.90%	3256	145	4.45% (Min.)
Session 3	3040	515	16.94%	2790	370	13.26%
Session 4	3400	525	15.44%	3030	460	15.18%
Session 5	3250	580	17.84%	3000	430	14.33%
Session 6	3160	558	17.65%	2850	380	13.33%
Session 7	2990	548	18.32% (Max.)	3170	360	11.35%
Session 8	3253	355	10.91%	2970	390	13.13%
Total	25693	3951	15.37%	24716	2735	11.06%

Note: (No.) number, (Ws) words, (%) percentages, (Min.) minimum and (Max.) maximum.

To answer the second research question regarding the purposes that the L1 utterances served in the EFL classrooms, the teachers' interview transcriptions were coded and analyzed carefully. The findings revealed that the teachers and students used L1 for 25 various purposes, including translation, L1-L2 contrast, evaluation, activity instruction, activity objective, elicitation of student contribution, personal comment, comprehension check, and administrative issues (See Table 1).

As it can be seen in Table 1 which is an extended form of De la Campa and Nassaji's (2009) coding scheme, in the present study, 11 additional functional categories have been identified including teacher support, encouragement, grammar explanation, clarification, past issues, linking back to previous experience in L1, making an excuse, asking for time, pet phrase, and asking and answering questions. The distribution of L1 use for each of the identified purposes differs significantly. As the categories and percentages presented in Table 3 show, some purposes that L1 served only belonged to the teachers' use of L1 (e.g., L1-L2 contrast, evaluation, activity instruction, activity objectives, elicitation of students' contribution, comprehension check, encouragement, grammar explanation, and giving reference), some belonged to the students' use of L1 (e.g., making excuses and asking for time) and some were the common purposes for which both the teachers and students used L1 (e.g., translation, personal comments, administrative issues, and humor). The percentages also indicate that the teachers (72%) used L1 more than the students (28%) and for a more variety of purposes (22 purposes) than the students (9 purposes). In particular, the teachers used L1 most frequently for the purposes of translation (11%) and grammar explanation (9%) and the students used it mostly for translation (7%) and asking questions (5%). The findings reveal that the teachers minimally used L1 for the purposes of evaluation (1%), classroom equipment (1%), encouragement (1%), past issues

(1%), and pet phrase (1%). The students also used L1 the least frequently for the purposes of administrative issues (1%) and asking for time (1%). These findings suggest that L1 use creates a conducive environment for language learning through mediating teacher-student and student-student interactions in the classroom (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Purposes of L1 Use for 16 Sessions

Teachers' purposes for L1 use: % (Total: 9.54%)	Students' purposes for L1 use: % (Total: 3.72%)
Translation: 11%	1. Translation: 7 %
L1-L2 contrast: 3%	2. Personal comment: 4%
Evaluation: 1%	3. Administrative issues: 1%
Activity instruction: 4%	4. Humor: 3%
Activity objectives: 2%	5. Past issues: 1%
Elicitation of students' contribution: 5%	6. Making an excuse: 2%
Personal comment: 3%	7. Asking for time: 1%
Comprehension check: 3%	8. Asking question: 5%
Classroom equipment: 1%	9. Answering question: 4%
Administrative issues: 3%	
Repetition of students L1 utterance: 2%	
Reaction to students question: 2%	
Humor: 5%	
Teacher as bilingual: 4%	
Teacher support: 2%	
Encouragement: 1%	
Grammar explanation: 9%	
Past issues: 1%	
Linking back to a previous experience in L1: 3%	
Pet phrase: 1%	
Asking question: 2%	
Answering question: 3%	

To analyze the findings through the lens of AT, it must be noted that L2/FL learning as a social skill and a purposeful goal-oriented activity occurs when the teachers and their students are involved in the EFL teaching and learning activity. They as subjects directing the activity towards the object through working collaboratively. In particular, learning happens when the students discover the gap between what they already know and what they are learning in the class through the tools they use (Nelson & Kim, 2001). In the present study, the teachers' object was to teach EFL and the students' object was to learn EFL. To reach this object, several tools were used including the books, visuals, technologies, hand-outs, pamphlets, various learning strategies, and the students' L1 which were the main tool being used by the teachers and students. Actually, the teachers had some useful information that the students could not understand on their own. To facilitate students' comprehension, the teachers used a myriad of tools among which the most useful one was the students' L1. The teachers shared knowledge with the students partially through L1. In this way, the teachers and their students as the community members had a "co-construction of useful knowledge" (Lin, 2007, p. 79). This division of labor was established through specific rules. The rules specified who must have done what in the EFL classrooms. The rules governing the investigated EFL classrooms only allowed a controlled and sensible use of the L1 since its overuse could damage the process of FL/L2 learning. Considering this rule, the teachers and students used a considerable amount of L1 (13.26%) in their classes which, as reported by the teachers, mediated the instruction of the new materials (see Figure 2) through functions it served such as translation, humor, explanation, repetition, etc. (See Table 3). The L1 was therefore a helpful tool with various functions for the community of teachers and students in an EFL classroom, which obviously

helped the teachers to improve their teaching. However, its effect on the students' learning has not been measured in the current study.
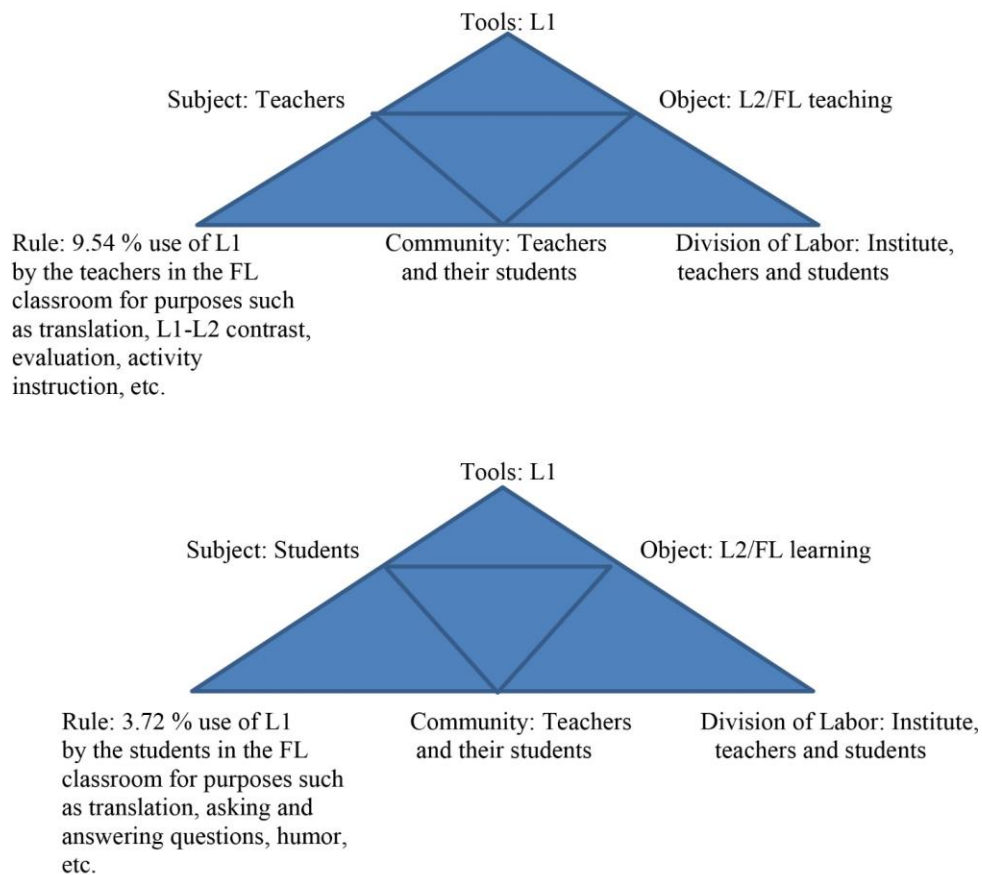

Figure 2.
L2/FL Teaching and Learning System

To answer the third research question regarding the teachers' reasons for using L1, the researchers categorized the data obtained under 6 general themes as shown in Table 4. The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that L1 (tool) was a helpful source to tackle the issues when it was not possible to provide the information in L2/FL due to the students' lack of proficiency and attention, or the classroom structure and shape in the pre-intermediate classrooms (community). The teachers (subject) also referred to the moments that they used L1 to convey a message, define a word, explain about an issue or express an idea, put an end to a discussion and bring up a new topic, encourage and motivate the students to contribute in the class discussions, remove the affective filters and provide an enjoyable and safe environment. Both teachers believed that although they used most of the pedagogical means (tool) available to them (e.g., exemplification, visualization, etc.), L1 was the most useful tool for giving instructions, giving definitions, explaining the ambiguities, clarifying the complex points, asking and answering questions, having fun, scaffolding, making a good rapport with them and providing a non-threatening learning environment (rule). As the teachers asserted, Farsi (tool) played the role of a mediating pedagogical mediator (tool) in their EFL classes (community). They suggested that L1 must be used as a scaffolding tool in teaching English it shapes learning (object) by providing the comprehensible input (rule) for the students (subject) and mediating their understanding (rule).

Table 4**.**

Thematic Categories of Teachers' Interviews

Thematic Categories	Definitions
L1 as a closure.	L1 was used to put an end to a discussion and start a new topic.
L1 as a stimulus.	L1 was used to motivate the students to be active in the classroom either in L1 or L2.
Bilingual context.	L1 was used because of the teachers' and students' ability in using both languages.
Foreign language context.	L1 was used due to the role of L1 as a foreign language in the Iranian context.
Classroom setup.	L1 was used due to the acoustic problems caused by the classroom setup.
Students' proficiency.	L1 was used since the students were not proficient enough to understand some topics in L2.

Discussion

The present study, conducted in pre-intermediate EFL classes in Iran, examined the amounts and purposes for teachers' and students' use of L1 in two EFL classrooms. Regarding the first research question concerning the amount of L1 use, the obtained results revealed a total amount of 13.26% of L1 use by the two teachers and their students. In particular, the students' L1 utterances had a 3.72% contribution to the whole words uttered in the 16 sessions and the teachers' L1 utterances had a 9.54% contribution. The total amount obtained in the present study indicates L1 use in the FL/L2 classes and accords with some earlier research which reports 11.3% use of English as L1 in German-as-a-foreign language courses (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009), 52.60%, and 9.56% use of English as L1 by two teachers in French-as-foreign language courses (White & Storch, 2008), and 3.4 % use of Farsi as L1 by teachers and students in Iranian EFL classes (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015).

The data also revealed further information regarding the second research question concerning the purposes for which L1 was used. The results of this study indicated that teachers employed L1 for 25 purposes including translation, evaluation, activity instruction, activity objective, personal comment, comprehension check, administrative issues, teacher support, encouragement, grammar explanation, linking back to previous experience in L1, making an excuse, asking for time, asking and answering questions, etc. Although most of these findings (e.g., translation, L1-L2 contrast, evaluation, activity instruction, activity objective, comprehension check, etc.) concur with the multiple purposes reported for L1 use in the previous studies (e.g., Gulzar, 2010; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Machaal, 2012), some of the functions (e.g., linking back to previous experience in L1, making an excuse, asking for time, pet phrase, etc.) have been found in the present study. Aligned with these aspects, the findings also revealed that a majority of L1 use was for translation (11%) and grammar explanation (9%) by the teachers and translation (7%) and asking questions (5%) by the students.

Second language teaching, to be fully understandable, should start from the old knowledge in the students' mind and move to the new knowledge since, according to AT, the prior knowledge as a mediating tool affects how the students (subject) perceive the new information (object). The findings of the present study indicate that the L1 use (tool) for purposes (rule) such as translation, activity instruction, activity objectives, grammar explanation, asking and answering questions, comprehension check provides such a platform for learning the L2/FL (object). These findings are aligned with the functions obtained by De la Campa and Nassaji (2009) (e.g., explaining a grammatical point, a topic or an assignment, translating the new vocabularies, and clarifying the ambiguities) Copland and Neokleous (2011) (e.g., teaching

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grammar, giving the meanings of new words, and explaining complex sentence structures and difficult concepts).

As bilingual students (subject) have access to both L1 and L2 lexicons (tool) and their reliance on the L1 property is really strong, L1 should be used to bridge the gap (object) between the new knowledge and the existing knowledge in their mind (Macaro, 2009). Aligned with the obtained results by Machaal (2012), which indicated that L1 (tool) was used as a cognitive tool when there was a lack of comprehension in L2. In this study, L1 was used to refer to the past issues and linked back to previous experience in L1 (rule) to facilitate the process of L2/FL comprehension (object); it was also used for L1-L2 contrast and as a sign of teachers' bilingualism (rule).

Moreover, to remove the affective filter and facilitate the L2 learning process (object), L1 can be used as a social resource (tool). For instance, L1 use for purposes such as humor (rule), as reported in this study, relieves the students' L2 anxiety and encourages them to use L2 (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). These functions are of supreme importance because they will increase the students' willingness to communicate through the L2 in classrooms (community). As the findings of the current study indicate, using L1 for evaluation, supporting, and encouragement (rule) makes the students (subject) more confident and motivates them for learning EFL (object). Ford (2009) obtained similar results indicating that L1 was used for making the students feel confident, decreasing their anxiety level while increasing their motivation. Machaal (2012) also supported these findings by referring that L1 use promoted collaborative work when the students had difficulty in understanding on their own.

Besides, it would be really hard to manage language classrooms without the help of students' L1 (tool) which can serve many managerial functions (rule) in FL/L2 classrooms (community) including controlling the classroom,

giving assignments, creating a friendly atmosphere, and building a rapport between the teacher and the students (Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). The managerial functions that L1 use served in this study included its use for administrative issues, classroom equipment, elicitation of students' contribution, providing personal comments, making humor, making an excuse, asking for the time, repetition of students' L1 utterances, and reaction to their questions (rule). These are all supported by a number of researchers such as Machaal (2012) who reported that L1 use for class management and administrative issues along with the other cognitive and social functions are useful resources on which both teachers and students (subject) can rely.

Regarding the third research question, which concerned the teachers' reasons for the use of L1 in their classrooms, the interview data revealed that both teachers had student-specific and context-specific reasons for their use of L1. They believed that the foreign language context of the classes and the students' bilingualism gave them a chance to use L1 for facilitating comprehension and making a safe learning environment. The teachers also demonstrated that they used L1 to alleviate some comprehension barriers, which arose due to the classroom setup and the students' low level of proficiency. Their reasons are aligned with the justifications reported by Storch and White (2008) including L1 use to make the students capable of understanding the issues, explain about the assignments and other administrative items as well as some certain grammatical points and to create a motivating classroom environment. In support of the mentioned reasons, Ford (2009) reported that the teachers interviewed in his study stated that they used L1 to simplify the difficult topics, to manage classrooms and make a rapport with the students, to help the students feel more comfortable in EFL setting and decrease their anxiety levels, and facilitate foreign language learning.

Conclusion and Implications

An activity-theoretical analysis of the findings of the present study showed that the teachers and their students used L1 as an important pedagogical tool for multiple purposes. As the findings of this study indicated, teachers used the students' L1 to contrast L1-L2, explained about grammar, instructed and explained about activities, elicited the students' contribution, evaluated their performance and checked their comprehension, repeated their L1 utterance and reacted to their questions, supported the students, encouraged them, etc. The findings also showed that different factors affect the teachers' decision upon the use of L1 including their teaching method, their students' proficiency level, classroom context, time constraints, etc. For instance, the further suggestions in the findings indicated that the students used their L1 for making excuses, and asking for time. These sentiments led to this conclusion that using students' L1 might support L2/EFL learning and teaching processes in the pre-intermediate levels as well as the elementary as students are not yet proficient to express themselves adequately in the target language.

Although this study examines the amounts, purposes, and reasons for L1 use in L2/FL classrooms through classroom recordings and teacher interviews, its findings are not generalizable since it only investigated two teachers' classrooms in a foreign language context. Future research could look into more cases using L1 in teaching English so that the results would have more generalizable. Another limitation of the current study was that it audio-recorded the classes, which caused to miss some important details in the student-student or teacher-student interactions. This limiting factor must be removed in future research as well. Furthermore, further research must be done to investigate the role of L1 use in the L2/FL classrooms and might support the indissoluble debate over its sufficient use.

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Appendix A

80	T	[in these] cases we have… the word more ( ) of adjectives, change it to the
81		comparative adjectives, ok?(0.1) This flower is beautiful but that flower i:::s?
82		[more beautiful] than this
83	Ls	[more beautiful]
84	T	ok?(0.3) another point is that... when.. the word has only one syllable, ok?
85		such as big,…such as big, **yek bakhshie**, ok? Has only one syllable,and (0.4)
86		there's a consonant at the end of the word, the consonant, **harfe bi seda**, ok?
87		a consonant and before that… there is a vowel, consonant and vowel, vowel
88		**harfe sedadar**, ok?(0.1) In these cases when you want to add er, the end of
89		such words(0.2) they will change into something like… for example bigger,
90		ok?(0.3) The final letter is doubled, ok?**tekrar mishe,** This is the case only
91		when you have a vowel and after that there
91		is a consonant ok? **Harvaght ye harfe samet umad badesh ye bi seda dar**
92		**tak bakhshiha faghad in tore**, ok? **Vaghti mikhad** er **ezafe beshe harfe**
93		**akhar tekrar mishe**, for example big bigger, hot? [hotter]
94	Ls	[hotter]
95	T	ok? (0.2)Another point is that there are also some exceptions, ok? For example
96		good becomes [better]
97	Ls	[better]
98	T	the comparative form, ok? Not gooder, ok?better, And the bad?
99	Ls	[worse]
100	T	[worse] **sefate ali ro baladid**? Superlatives (0.4)
		The teacher writes on the board
101	T	superlative, comparative means **tafzili**, ok? …Comparative and superlative,
102		superlative for example, big.. bigger in comparative form, in superlative will
103		be [biggest]

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104	**Ls**	[biggest]
105	**T**	ok? **Bozorg bozorgtar bozorgtarin**, ok? you will add est at the end of that
106		word, that adjective if you want to change it to a superlative form(0.3), in this
107		example, in this case also final letter will be doubled ok? When there is a
108		vowel and after that there is a consonant(0.3), in the case of these exceptions
109		goo::d… such as good,(0.2) the comparative form i::s?
110	**L4**	better
111	**T**	better …and what is the superlative fo::rm?
112	**Ls**	the best
113	**T**	the best, ok?(0.3) When you want to change an adjective into a superlative
114		form… you will also add the at the beginning of that adjective, the biggest
115		ok?(0.1)
115	**Ls**	yes
116	**L5**	**hamishe injurie dige?**
117	**T**	yes yes, we should always add the to the beginning of the superlative adjective
118		ok? The biggest or the best, what about bad?(0.3)
119	**Ls**	the worst=
120	**T**	=the wo:::rst and what is the superlative form?
121	**L3**	the worst
122	**Ls**	[the worst]
123	**T**	[the worst]
		The teacher writes on the board
124		ok? the worst ok?(0.2) **Badtarin**, ok as you can see in page 78, do you have
125		these pants in a larger size? do you have these pants in a larger size? These
126		pairs is too tight, ok? Too tight, tight means?
127	**Ls**	°**tang**°
128	**T**	ok, [a:::nd]
129	**Ls**	[tight **yani chi?**]=
130	**T**	=↑use <u>more</u> or less adjectives that has >more syllables< and don't end in… y,

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131		ok?... Some adjectives end in y, °for example° what? <u>Pretty</u> ok:::?... **Y hastesh**
132		**dige**,pretty for example(0.3) plus <u>er</u> prettier, ok::? (0.3)Even when the word **or**
133		adjective consists of more than one syllable ok::? (0.1)But it ends in <u>y</u>, you **can**
134		add <u>er</u> in order to change it to <u>comparative form</u>, oka::y?... Did you get it?(0.1)
135		Oka:::y?(0.4) °pretty°=
135	**L2**	=°again°=
136	**T**	=what?
137	**L2**	again which ( )
138	**T**	again?=
139	**L2**	=yes,[**tozih bedin**]
140	**T**	[ok] I said that when an adjective ends in <u>y</u>, the final letter is <u>y</u>, ok? And
141		you want to change it into a comparative adjective, a comparative form, ok?(0.2)
142		A:::and you can also add <u>er</u> to the end of that word even…even when that
143		adjective consists of more than one syllable, **Hata vaghti k bish az ye bakhsh**
144		**dashte bashe:::, chikar mikonim? Age akharesh y bud mishe er ro ezafe**
145		**kard** ok?=
145	**L2**	**=bad hamishe be tartib er mishe?=**
146	**T**	=yes, not in all cases, [whe::n]=
147	**L4**	[y]
148	**T**	=when the letter before y i::s [consonant]
149	**Ls**	[consonant]
150	**T**	=not vowel ok? …This is the case,(0.3) but in the case of adjectives which
151		consists of more than one syllable you should add more, ok? For example
152		more beautiful (0.3) uuuuu,for example mo:::re, for example what? Give an
153		example? For example what?
153	**Ls**	expensive

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154	**T**	more expensive or more interesting, these adjectives consists of more than one
155		syllable. (0.3)You can also add less,(0.2) less **yani chi?** Good better best,ok?
156		**khub khubtar khubtarin**, ok? Or more expensive and the most expensive,
157		there are a point here and it is that when you want to <u>change</u>… an adjective
158		that consists of more than one syllable into a superlative fo::::rm you will add
159		<u>most</u> in the beginning of that adjective, in comparative form you should add
160		<u>more</u> and a superlative form **ghesmate** ( ) most, for example more
161		beautiful? [The most beautiful]
162	**Ls**	[The most beautiful]
163	**T**	ok? **Zibatar, ziba tarin**, ok? (0.3) **Chize khasi dasht?**
164	**L6**	**less pas chi?**
165	**T**	aha, less, for example less expensive ok?(0.2) Less expensive, **ye meghdar**
166		**grammaresh kamtare**, ok? **Arzuntare**, less less expensive, please pay
167		attention to these examples
		The teacher reads the examples from the book loudly
168		do you have a more comfortable pair of shoe:::s?
169		Ok?(0.3) ok
		Learner2 asks the teacher to let her leave the class