

TOO ANXIOUS TO TALK IN ENGLISH AND BE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM: STUDENT AND TEACHER OPINIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF USING FIRST LANGUAGE (L1) IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) CLASSROOM

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The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of using L1 in the L2 classroom on the students' Sense of Security (SS) in the ESL classroom and Willingness To Communicate (WTC) in English. Schweers (1999) concludes that "using Spanish has led to positive attitudes towards the process of learning English and, better yet, encourages the students to learn more English." The groups 1-12 in ESL 100 level (the target group of this research) are the lowest competency groups, so the instructors are inclined to use L1 for various reasons. Because of these reasons, this research aims to prove that "starting with the L1 provides a Sense of Security and validates the learners life experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English" (Auerbach, 1993). Questionnaires were used to collect information from 160 undergraduates and 24 Instructors in English, who are attached to the English Language Teaching Unit, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya. The results of the study substantiate that both the undergraduates and instructors prefer and deem it necessary to use L1 in the ESL classroom for various purposes. They also commented that using only English in the class makes the learning experience mostly negative. It was found that when the teacher uses Sinhala in the ESL classroom, about 70% - 90% of the time students feel a Sense of Security, and in a ESL class where the teacher uses Sinhala, about 40% of the time students feel a Willingness To Communicate in English. It is concluded that using L1 creates a sense of security in students which is important to make learning ESL a less frightening task to do. Therefore, by creating a Sense of Security, using L1 also facilitates the students' willingness to communicate in English. When the students feel safe and confident enough in the class, they then try to communicate in English, because they are secure in the knowledge that they have the support of their L1. However, it should be noted that the study has only considered Sinhala as a L1, because majority of the instructors' and students' L1 is Sinhala. Considering the important role of L1 in learning/teaching L2, the university should take necessary steps to facilitate resources for the Tamil medium students as well.

Keywords: Anxious, Sense of security, Willingness to communicate