# Using the L1 in the Classroom

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**Definitions**

***multi-competence*** means knowledge of two or more languages in one mind

***compound bilinguals***  link the two languages in their minds

***coordinate bilinguals*** keep the languages apart

***reciprocal language teaching*** is a teaching method in which pairs of students alternately teach each other their languages

**The traditional principle:** minimise using the L1 in the classroom

Howatt (1984, p.289), ‘the monolingual principle, the unique contribution of the twentieth century to classroom language teaching, remains the bedrock notion from which the others ultimately derive’.

**Maxim**: discourage the use of the L1 in the classroom.  
           strongest: *ban the L1 from the classroom*.  
           weakest: *minimise the L1 in the classroom*.

**The Academic Justifications**

1. *L1 acquisition;* children in the L1 can't fall back on another language
2. *Compartmentalisation;* the L1 and L2 should be kept separate at all times

**Teaching Reasons** (mostly unstated):  
· maximise quantity of L2  
· use L2 for real-life functions

But the classroom is L2 use, not imitation L1

**Methods that deliberately involve the L1**

(A) alternating language methods  
[Reciprocal language teaching](http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/Papers/ReciprocalLT.htm) [Tandem,](http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/etandem/etindex-en.html)  
Two-Way immersion: Alternating Days etc.

(B) methods that actively create links between L1 and L2

i) the New Concurrent Method  
ii) Community Language Learning (CLL)  
iii) the Bilingual Method  
iv) bilingual presentation methods

**Ways of Using the L1 in the classroom**

**Factors in using L1:** efficiency, learning, naturalness, external relevance

**A. Teacher conveying meaning**

- teacher using L1 for conveying meaning of words or sentences  
- teacher using L1 as a meta-language for explaining grammar

**B. Teacher organising the class**

- teacher using L1 for managing the classroom  
- teacher using L1 for giving instructions for teaching activities  
- L1 used for testing

**C. Students using L1 within the class**

- students using L1 as part of main learning activity  
- students using L1 incidentally within classroom activities

Howatt (1984, p.289): if there is another ‘language teaching revolution’ round the corner, it will have to assemble a convincing set of arguments to support some alternative (bilingual?) principle of equal power’

**Dodson's Bilingual Method:** a teaching method that uses the student's first language to establish the meanings of the second language.

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