

The Use of Mother Tongue in Moroccan Classes of English

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Abstract This study deals with one of the most contentious phenomena in English language teaching, meaning here the use of mother tongue, Arabic, in teaching English as a foreign language. The study at hand aims at examining the degree to which Arabic is used in Moroccan High School classes of English. It reflects and explores the attitudes of high school instructors towards the usage of Arabic and their reasons behind using it. It also aims at investigating which gender uses Arabic more in classes of English. Besides, this paper tries to discuss the relationship between the use of the mother tongue and years of teaching experience. The findings of this study which were accumulated through a questionnaire and classroom observations suggest that Arabic is rarely used in the high school classrooms of English by teachers. Furthermore, the findings indicate that Arabic is used more by teachers in order to translate vague or difficult words and concepts.

Keywords Arabic, Mother Tongue, Translation, L1 and L2, Years of Experience

pleased, satisfied and has a delightful feeling of success. In this case, students might choose to translate phrases and words to their mother tongue without the permission of the teacher. This is confirmed by Wilkins (1974) who clearly states that the phenomenon of translation is seen as a natural process and unavoidable part of English learning. He also believes that students inexorably and even 'unconsciously' endeavor to associate English language words and structure with most familiar words in the mother tongue. When a teacher realizes that a certain English word happens to be completely recognizable to the student, then the use of Arabic here is of course avoided. Other studies such as Quadumi (2007) and Al Nofaie (2010), which will be explained and discussed later in this paper, assert that using the mother tongue in English teaching is to be avoided. Accordingly, it is deduced that the role of the teacher here is to make students quite familiar with the new words, so that there will be no need for translation into Arabic. However, teachers should always be careful of the context of using Arabic in English classes in order to conduct their classes successfully and efficiently.

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that the use of Arabic is seen as defective means for learning a foreign language, it is helpful in particular situations when communication breaks down. Using Arabic as a method for teaching English might happen particularly in the beginning of learning English, but such use must be framed by some rules. For example, the use of Arabic should be done mainly by the teacher and not by the student. It is also advisable not to use literal translation, meaning here word by word. This does not happen only in the form level but also in meaning. We find that clauses and sentences are more convenient for translation into Arabic. The same happen when dealing with abstract nouns, here it is better to translate them accurately. The use of Arabic is desired in many cases when it is inevitable because prohibiting the use of Arabic in all cases is not advisable. We might find a student who sometimes if not often thinks in Arabic. A student searches in his or her mind for the equivalent in Arabic. When he or she finds it, he or she is

2. Hypothesis

The main problematic that this paper deals with is the question to what extent Arabic language is used in Moroccan classes of English. This refers to the frequency of the use of Arabic in Moroccan high school classes of English and whether the teacher, being male or female, resort to the native language in English language teaching. As an anticipated hypothetical assumption, it is quite presumed that Moroccan teachers use Arabic in teaching English as a second language. This paper also investigates the factors contributing to the use of Arabic as a mother tongue in English language teaching; that is to say, the determinants such as gender, age and years of teaching experience that may arise as dynamics governing the use of Arabic. Additionally, this study targets the reasons behind using Arabic by Moroccan teachers of English supposing that teachers use Arabic in teaching the four skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) along with the other aspects of language (structure, functions and vocabulary). In fact,

students' use of Arabic is also depicted as a frequent phenomenon occurring in high school classes of English. For this reason, this paper examines the correlation between the frequent use of Arabic and disruptive behaviors such as noise.

3. Research Questions

This paper seeks to achieve the following objectives and answer these questions:

- Do Moroccan high school teachers of English use Arabic in their classes?
- To what degree is Arabic used in Moroccan classes of English?
- What are the reasons behind the use of Arabic in Moroccan classes of English?
- Do years of teaching experience act as a factor in using Arabic?
- Does gender work as a determining agent in using Arabic in ELT?
- Does students 'excessive use of Arabic in English language classes bring about noise and misbehaviors?

4. Methodology

The above hypothetical issues are addressed and investigated through two methods: classroom observations and a questionnaire. The first method took part in different high schools in Fes from January till the mid of June 2014. The second procedure refers to a questionnaire distributed to various teachers from different parts of Morocco and taking into account gender and age differences (see appendix 1).

Analytical Part

II)- Findings and Data Analysis

A. Methodology and Demographics

This study was designed to investigate the use of Arabic by Moroccan teachers of English in their classes. The study's data were collected during 2014 spring through a questionnaire and classroom observations.

A questionnaire in English was distributed randomly to high school teachers of English between the age of 21 and 45. The sample consisted of 35 high school teachers of English from different geographical areas in Morocco: 16 are females (45%) and 19 are males (55%) (see figure 1). The participants differ in terms of their years of teaching experience: 14 participants have less than 6 months (40%), 5 participants have between 1 and 2 years (14.28%), 2 participants have between 2 and 5 (5.71%) , and 7 participants have between 6 and 10 (20%), and 7 participants have more than 10 years of experience (20%) (see figure 2).

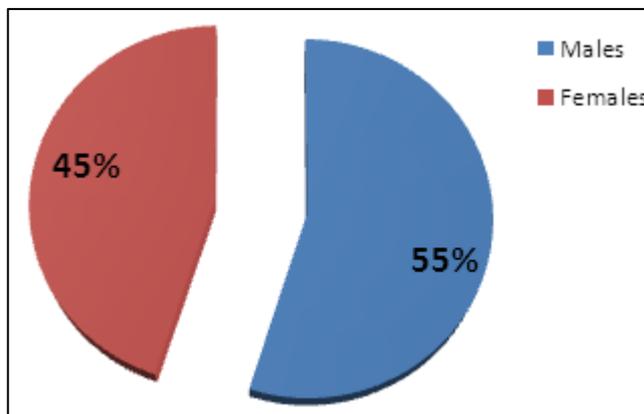


Figure 1. Male and Females Respondents

Years of Experience	Count	Percentage
Less than 6 months	14	40
Between 6 months and 2 years	5	14.28
Between 2-5years	2	5.71
Between 6-10	7	20
More than 10 years	7	20

Figure 2. Years of Experience

This study was also based on classroom observations. Four male teachers and four female teachers of English were observed in their classes to collect information about the use of Arabic and the reasons behind using it. The four observed teachers have more than ten years of experience and they were observed for three sessions per each. Classroom observations are used to analyze the questionnaire data and to explain the results.

B. The Use of Arabic in Moroccan classes of English

To measure and to know the frequency of the use of Arabic in Moroccan classes of English, the questionnaire asked the participants to determine whether they use Arabic or not and to provide the frequency of using it per session (always, usually, often, sometimes, or rarely). The answers are as follows:

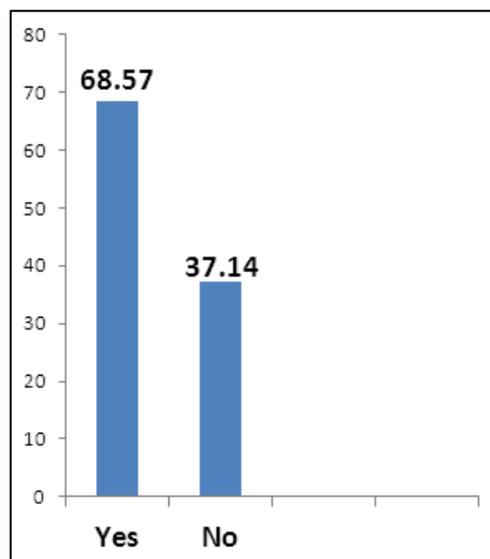


Figure 3. The use of Arabic of Moroccan teachers in English classes

Table 1. The use of Arabic of Moroccan teachers in English classes

The use of Arabic by Moroccan teachers English	Yes	No
	24 (68.57)	13 (37.14)

Table 2. The frequency of the use of Arabic by Moroccan Teachers of English in their classes

	Always	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	0	0	0	2(8.33)	22 (91.66)

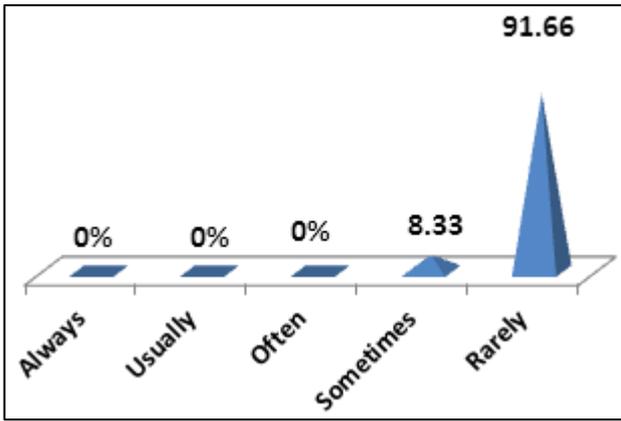


Figure 4. The frequency of the use of Arabic by Moroccan Teachers of English in their classes

From the above data, it is clear that the Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic in their classes. (table 1 and figure 3). A majority of (68.57%) confirm their use of Arabic in their classes versus a smaller rate of (37.14%) identifying themselves as non-users of Arabic. This finding confirms Al Nofaie’s study (2010) which shows that L1 is needed

sometimes by teachers of second language to facilitate the learning process.

Although Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic, the above data indicate also that the frequency of this use is very limited per session. A striking majority of (91.66%) use Arabic “rarely” and 8.33% use Arabic “sometimes” in a session. This result is also confirmed by classroom observations. It seems that the observed teachers of English have tended to use Arabic, but no more than one sentence per session. Moroccan teachers of English, then, use Arabic in their classes. However, they do not use it very frequently.

Such a result reflects the importance of the limited use of the mother tongue in English language teaching in Moroccan classes of English. Moroccan teachers tend not to abide by Moroccan ministerial instructions which repeatedly insist on the use of the Second language in language teaching. This result may be attributed to many reasons. First, Moroccan teachers might have moved far away from the audio-lingual method which bans the use of the mother tongue in second language teaching. Second, the current Moroccan teachers might be highly influenced by Communicative language approach, at least at the level of content, which has left the audio-lingual ban on the limited use of L1 in language teaching. A third possibility, which classroom observations have come to suggest, is that the low level of students may sometimes be another real factor behind teachers’ limited use of Arabic in classes of English. It is also worth mentioning that the use of Arabic by Moroccan teachers of English is usually in favor of Moroccan dialect rather than the standard form of Arabic (see figure 5 below) which can be explained in the fact that teachers find it easy and natural to use the mother tongue than to use the standardized Arabic.

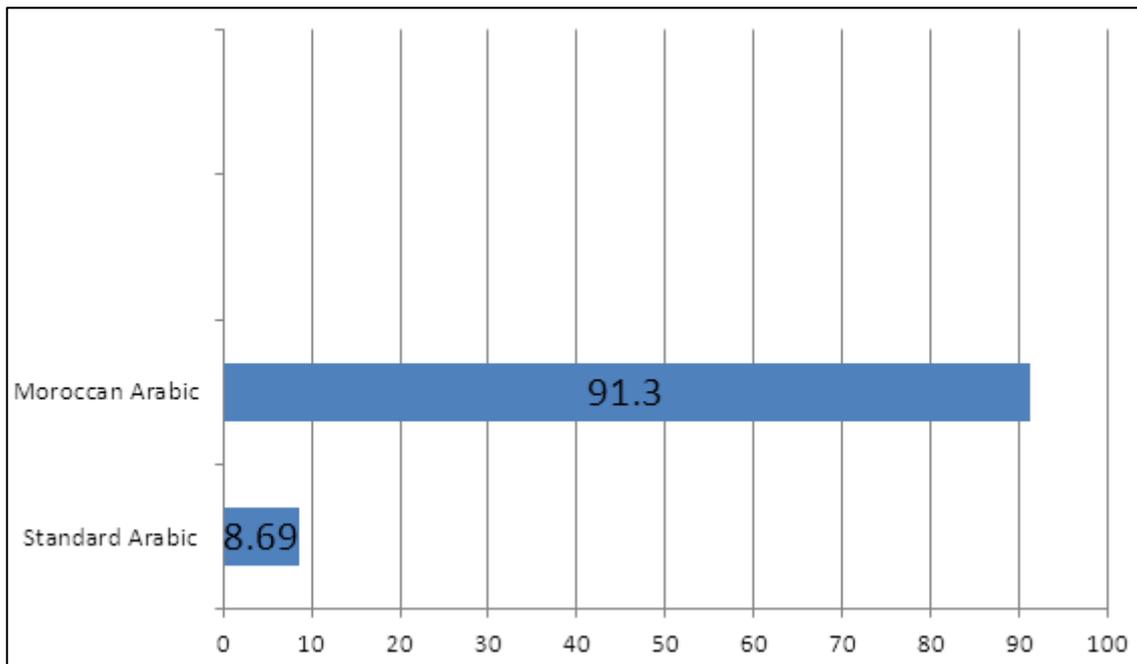


Figure 5. The variety of Arabic that Moroccan Teachers of English use in their classes of English

C. Gender and experience

Concerning the factors behind the use of the mother tongue in second language teaching, gender may be of great importance. Quadumi study (2007) indicates that the use of the mother tongue in TESL is avoided and considered anti-pedagogical by female teachers of English. Quadumi attributes this result to the fact that female teachers tend to abide by the pedagogical instructions of their supervisors.

The third and the fourth questions of the questionnaire aimed to investigate whether there is a difference between male and female teachers in the use of Arabic in classes of English. The results have refuted Quadumi’s conclusion showing that there is no significant difference in using Arabic in TESL due to the gender determinant. An important finding in the present questionnaire is that a majority of 11 female participants (68.75%) confirm their use of Arabic in English language teaching versus just 5 female participants (31.25%) who identify themselves as non-users of Arabic in English language teaching (see figure 6). The same result was deduced through classroom observations. 2 males and 2 females teachers of English were observed and all of them tended to use Moroccan Arabic in ELT without any differences due to the gender determinant. Also, there is no significant difference between males and females in the use of the mother tongue in ELT since 61% of male participants are users of Arabic versus 68% of female participants who are users of Arabic (see figure 7).

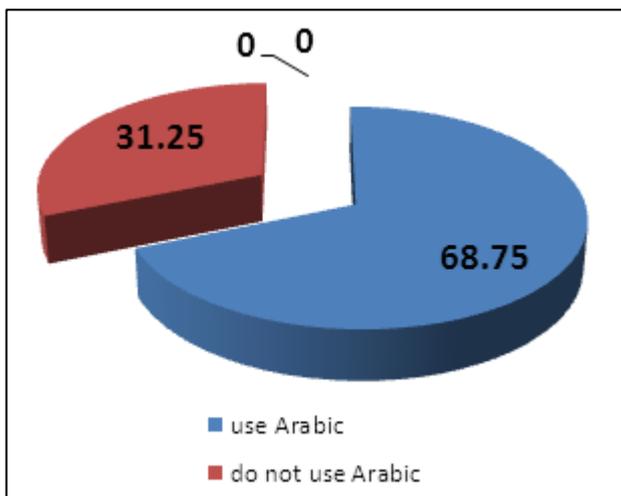


Figure 6. Female teachers who use Arabic in ELT

To determine whether there is a relationship between years of teaching experience and teachers’ use of Arabic, the questionnaire asked the participants to specify their years of experience before providing a response to the use of Arabic in ELT. The answers suggest that there is a close relationship between experience and teachers’ use of Arabic in ELT. The results show that all teachers with more than 6 years of experience (20 of the participants) use Arabic in their classes of English while 13 out of 14 teachers with less than 6 months of experience do not use Arabic at all. This finding may be attributed to the fact that less experienced teachers

tend to abide by ministerial instructions and they are a little bit cautious about pedagogical risks of the use of L1. This finding also shows quite the opposite of the hypotheses which suggest that lack of experience is the reason why teachers of English use L1.

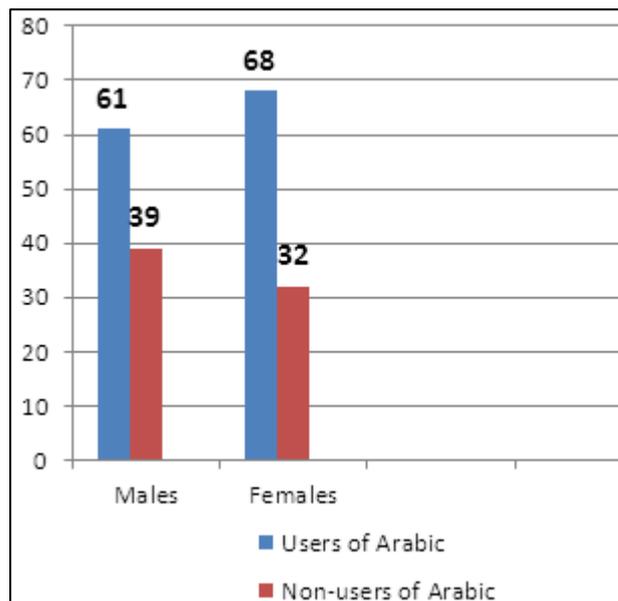


Figure 7. Male and Female teachers’ use of Arabic in ELT

D. Reasons behind Moroccan teachers’ use of Arabic in ELT

In recent years, many studies have been carried out to investigate the reasons why teachers of English use the mother tongue in their teaching.

There are many reasons why the mother tongue is used in TESL. One of the main reasons that applied linguists have ascribed to the use of the mother tongue in language teaching is “time saving”. Shimizu (2007) concludes that time saving is one of the frequent reasons why teachers of second languages resort to the mother tongue. Another common reason for teachers’ use of L1 in ELT is to facilitate communication between students and their teachers. Following this logic, Nation (2003) considers that the use of the mother tongue in TESL is needed to achieve more communication between students and teachers and to avoid barriers between the two partners. The mother tongue is also frequently used in TESL in order to explain or translate unknown or abstract words. For this Turnbull (2001) comes up with the idea that “it is efficient to make a quick switch to L1 to ensure that students understand an unknown word”.

There are also many other reasons of the use of the mother tongue in teaching English as a second language such as checking students understanding, helping shy students, giving instructions, explaining grammatical rules. In order to answer the question of the reasons behind using the mother tongue in TESL by Moroccan teachers, the questionnaire asked the participants to tick one of main reasons why they use Arabic in their classes of English and determine for which aspect of language they use it. The answers are as follows:

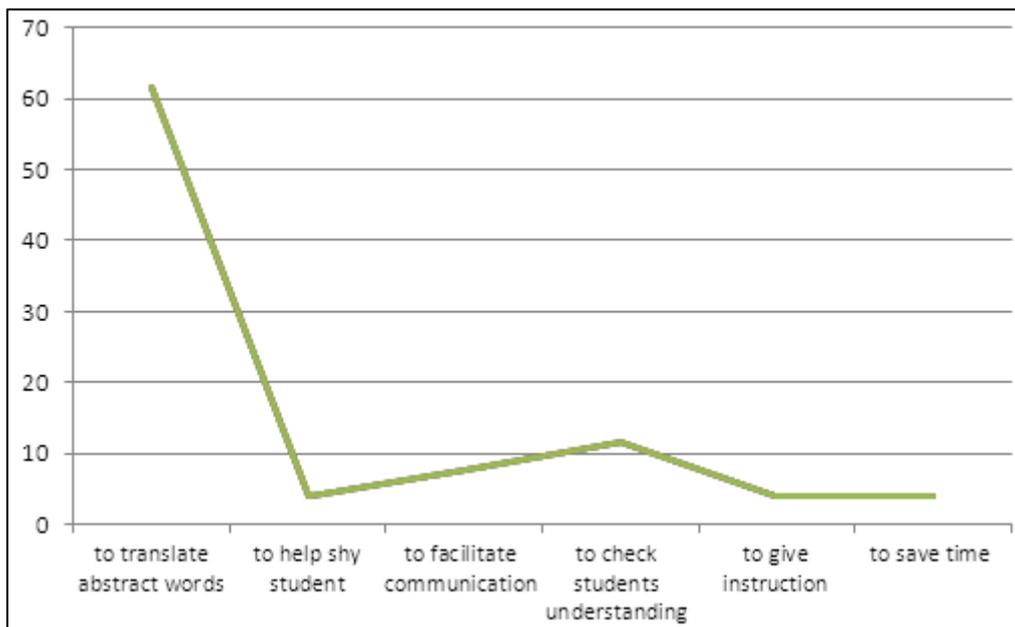


Figure 8. The reasons of using Arabic in Moroccan classes of English

Table 3. The reasons of using Arabic in Moroccan classes of English

Reasons	Participants	Percentages
To translate abstract words	16	61.53
To help shy students	1	3.84
To facilitate communication	2	7.69
To check students understanding	3	11.53
To give instructions	1	3.84
To save time	1	3.84
To manage the class	0	00
To explain complex grammar rules	1	3.84
Other reasons	1	3.84

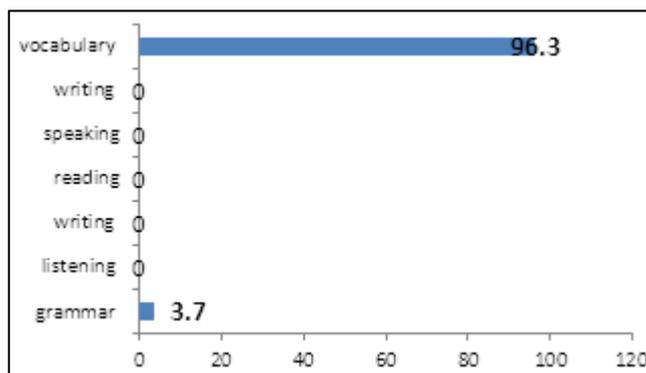


Figure 9. Skills or aspects of English language in which Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic

Table 4. Skills or aspects of English language in which Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic

Aspects or skills of language	Participants	Percentage
Grammar	1	3.70
Listening	0	0
Writing	0	0
Reading	0	0
Speaking	0	0
Writing	0	0
Vocabulary	26	96.30

The data above show that the main reason why Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic is to translate abstract words. This result is substantially justified with 61.53% of Moroccan teachers of English using Arabic to translate abstract words. There are other reasons behind the use of Arabic by Moroccan teachers of English, but they are not very common: 3.84% of teachers use Arabic to help shy students, 7.69% to facilitate communication, 11.53% to check students understanding, 3.84% to give instructions, 3.84% to save time, 3.84% to explain grammar, 3.84% use Arabic for other reasons (see table 3 and figure 8). Thus, using Arabic to translate abstract words was one of the most common reasons why Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic in their classes.

Respondents were also asked for what aspects or skills of language, they use Arabic in TESL. A striking majority of respondents (96.3%) in this questionnaire confirm that they use Arabic for vocabulary teaching versus just 3.7% of respondents who use Arabic for grammar explanation.

Respondents also confirm that they are not interested in using Arabic for teaching the four skills: reading- speaking – reading – writing (see table 4 and figure 9). It is clear then that Arabic is used by Moroccan teachers of English mainly for vocabulary teaching.

Interestingly, classroom observations of the four classes of English come in agreement with the questionnaire results. Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic for teaching vocabulary. It was noticed that the four observed teachers of English used Arabic when students failed to grasp unfamiliar words or abstract or cultural concepts. For example, having explained the word “altruism” in English through pictures and demonstrations, one of the observed teachers asked his students “what is charity in Arabic?” and a student replied with a correct answer. Almost similarly, another observed teacher pronounced the word “culture” in Arabic to his students. In this way, the use of Arabic in TESL is used in vocabulary teaching context to make sure that students have understood an abstract word or to translate difficult or vague words.

The fact that Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic to translate or explain an abstract or difficult word finds some echoes in other previous studies such as cook’s 2001 that supported the mother tongue’s use in TESL to clear up the meaning of abstract or difficult concepts and words. To use Arabic most commonly in vocabulary teaching is also, in general, come in agreement with the labels of the communicative approach which allows the use of L1 in a limited way in order to avoid vocabulary vagueness and difficulty.

The result also reveals that the use of Arabic by Moroccan teachers of English to explain grammar is substantially lower among respondents (3.7%). This lower rate can be attributed to teachers’ awareness of language or grammatical interference which applied linguists, most of the time, try to avoid. Al Harbi (2010) defines language interference as “the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language”. For this reason, although Cook (2001) and communicative language approach advocates and permits the use of L1, they insist on the division between the mother tongue and the L2 in teaching grammatical structures so as to avoid language interference. Conclusively, it could be said that Moroccan teachers do not use Arabic in grammar teaching very frequently since they have been theoretically and pedagogically assimilated in the communicative language teaching approach.

In general, Moroccan teachers of English use Arabic most commonly in a very limited way in the context of vocabulary teaching. The majority of them use it to translate abstract words or to explain difficult concepts. Such kind of use does really come in agreement with the theoretical and pedagogical instructions of the communicative language teaching approach. This finding is also confirmed by Moroccan teachers’ attitudes towards the use of Arabic in TESL which reflects teachers’ conviction of the limited and

reasonable use of L1, purely a communicative approach tenet. Look at the table and figure below:

Table 5. The Attitudes of Moroccan Teachers of English towards the Use of Arabic in TESL

	Number	Percentage
Limited and reasonable	24	68.57
Never	8	22.85
A lot	3	8.57

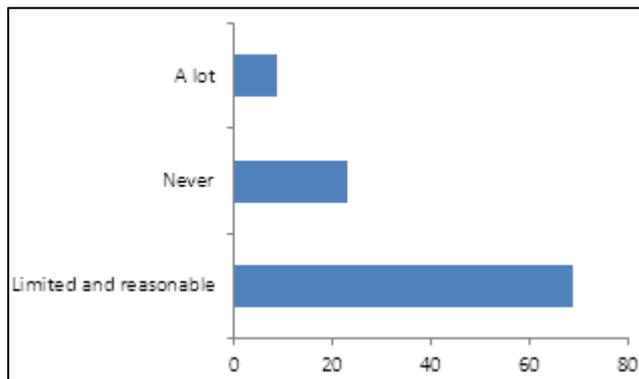


Figure 10. The Attitudes of Moroccan Teachers of English towards the Use of Arabic in TESL

E. Students’ Use of Arabic in TESL and Classroom Misbehaviors and Noise

Most Moroccan students of English as a second language tend to use Arabic in their classes of English. This is highly confirmed by this survey whose most respondents replied to the question “do your students use Arabic in your class of English” positively. This is concretely underpinned by the following data:

Table 6. Do your Students use Arabic in your Class of English?

Yes	No
33(94.28)	2 (5.7)

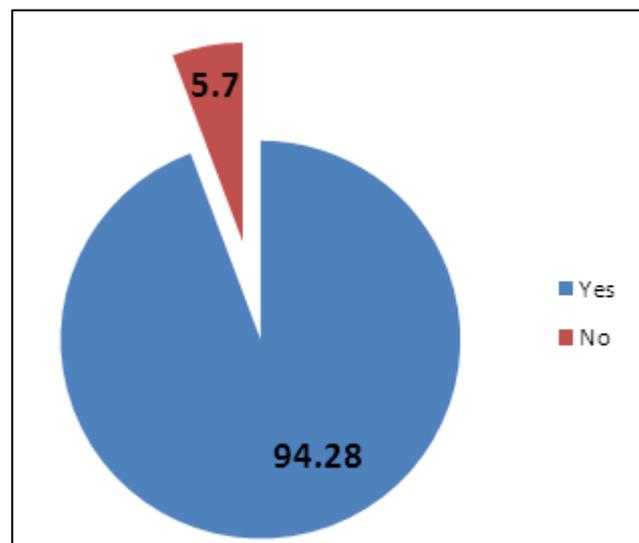


Figure 11. Do your Students use Arabic in your Class of English

During classroom observations, it was noticed that most students use Arabic commonly and mainly for one of these three main reasons: to make troubles, to ask for clarifications or to check their understanding. For this reason, the question of the relationship between classroom misbehavior and students' use of Arabic come to the forefront. On that basis, it was of paramount importance to investigate the relationship between classroom misbehaviors and students' excessive use of Arabic. To answer this rising question, the questionnaire asked the respondents to identify one of the three mentioned reasons as a main reason behind students' use of Arabic. The results were as follows:

Table 7. The Reasons behind Moroccan Students' Use of Arabic in English Language Classes

Reasons	respondents	Percentage
To make troubles	20	58.82
To ask for clarifications	10	29.4
To check their understanding	4	11.76

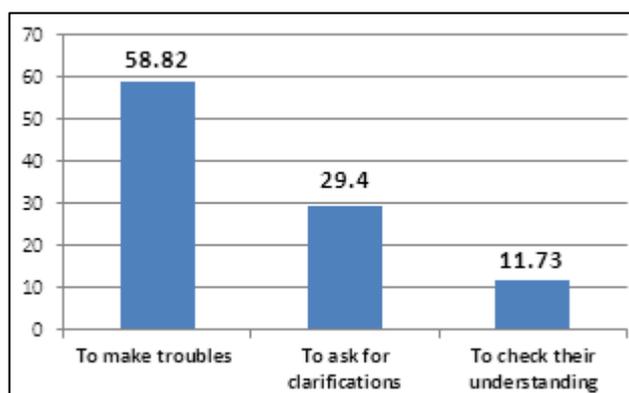


Figure 12. The Reasons behind Moroccan Students' Use of Arabic in English Language Classes

To the question "for what reasons do your students use Arabic", the majority of respondents (58.82%) ticked "to make troubles" as a main reason behind students' use of Arabic. Only 29.4% of Moroccan teachers attributed students' use of Arabic to "asking for clarification" versus a drastically low rate of 11.73% of respondents who justified students' use of Arabic with students' "checking understanding". The same result was gigantically assured during classroom observations. Students' use of Arabic in English classrooms, most of the time, was hiding an attempt to misbehave, to laugh at teachers, to talk to their classmates, or to make noise. For example, most of the observed students used Arabic in English classrooms to comment on the teachers' appearance, to parrot the English sounds in Arabic, to comment on their classmates' answers, or even to insult each others. In this way, misbehavior in class can be directly linked to students' frequent use of Arabic in ELC. This is clearly shown by our respondents' positive responses to the question "does the Moroccan students' frequent use of Arabic in ELC motivate them to make a lot of noise?" (See

table 8 and figure 13):

Table 8. Does Students' Frequent Use of Arabic in ELC motivate them to make a lot of Noise?

Answers	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	30	88.25
No	4	11.76

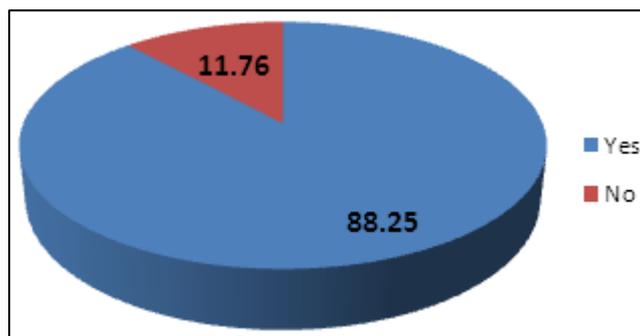


Figure 13. Does Students' Frequent Use of Arabic in ELC motivate them to make a lot of Noise?

The fact that students' use of Arabic in ELC is closely connected to trouble-making and misbehaviors can be explained in various ways. First, the frequent use of Arabic allows students to talk about irrelevant topics digressing from the lesson's focus. Second, by using Arabic so frequently from the side of students, the degree of formality in the relationship between teachers of English and their students decreases. As a result, students may tend to ask about things which do not concern the class topic or to intrude upon the personal life of their teachers. Third, students' frequent use of Arabic in ELC does put no restrictions on students' oral interventions in class and transforms, consequently, the classroom from a formal to an informal space. Due to the adverse effects of the use of Arabic by students in ELC, it is quite advisable that Moroccan teachers of English monitor their students' use of Arabic as much as possible for classroom managerial purposes.

5. Conclusions

Through the results of the data discussed above, this study has revealed that the use of Arabic is a phenomenon in Moroccan classrooms of teaching English. The findings have shown that most Moroccan teachers of English, regardless of gender, use Arabic, although rarely. Also, they use Arabic in their classes, most of the time, to teach new vocabulary items. The results have also denied the assumption that lack of experience is a factor behind teachers' use of Arabic in ELC. Interestingly, the study has proven that Moroccan experienced teachers of English are more likely to use Arabic in comparison to less experienced teachers of English. All these results indicate that Moroccan teachers of English, in general, do not support the monolingual teaching

approach in its ban of the use of the mother tongue in language teaching. Rather, Moroccan teachers of English agree, at least at the level of practice, with the communicative language teaching approach in its common argument that using the mother tongue in language teaching is acceptable when it is limited and judicious. The findings have also shown a clear connection between students' frequent use of Arabic in English language classes and the ascendancy of misbehavior phenomenon in classrooms of English.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

CONTENT

I would like really to thank you for filling this questionnaire which aims to investigate:

- The frequency of the use of Arabic in Moroccan classes of English.
- The reasons behind the use of Arabic in Moroccan classes of English.
- The relationship between experience and the use of Arabic in classes of English.
- The relationship between gender and the use of Arabic in classes of English.
- The reasons behind students' use of Arabic.
- The relationship between the use of Arabic and noise.

1. Gender: male female

2. How many years of experience do you have in teaching English?

- a. Less than 6 months
- b. Between 6 months and 2 years
- c. Between 2 – 5 years
- d. Between 6 – 10 years
- e. More than 10 years

3. Do you use Arabic in your class of English?

Yes No

4. If yes, how often do you use Arabic in your class of English?

Always usually often
 sometimes rarely

5. Which Arabic do you use often in your class?

Moroccan Arabic
 Standard Arabic

6. For what reasons do you use Arabic in your class of English?

- a. To translate abstract words
- b. To help shy students
- c. To facilitate communication
- d. To check students understanding
- e. To give instructions
- f. To save time
- g. To manage the class
- h. To explain complex grammar rules
- i. Other reasons.....

7. For what language skills or aspects do you think the use of Arabic is most suitable?

Grammar Writing
 Speaking Listening
 Reading vocabulary

Why?.....

8. Do your students use Arabic in your class of English?

Yes No

If yes, for what reasons?

- To make troubles
- To ask for clarifications
- To check if they have understood
- Other reasons:

9. From your own experience, does the frequent use of Arabic in classes of English motivate students to make a lot of noise? If yes? Why?

.....

10. In your opinion, do you think that the use of Arabic in classes of English should be:

Limited and reasonable
 never used
 used as much as possible

Thank you very much

List of Abbreviations

TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language
 ELT: English Language Teaching
 ELC: English Language Classroom
 L1: First Language
 L2: Second Language

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