

Name: **Weronika Krzebietke**

Title: **Own language use in the EFL classroom: Polish teachers' practices and attitudes**

### **Abstract**

The role of learners' own language (or L1) in foreign language teaching has been a subject of a methodological debate since the end of the 19th century (Butzkamm 2003). Throughout the history of TEFL attitudes towards own language use in EFL have fluctuated (Howatt 1984). The grammar-translation method introduced at the end of the 18th century deemed students' own language as crucial, as virtually every aspect of language teaching in the grammar-translation method relied heavily on the use of learners' L1 (Howatt 1984, Richards and Rodgers 1986, Howatt and Smith 2014, Cook 2010). Towards the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century attempts were made at introducing teaching methods that engaged the taught language more, first by the pre-reformers and then by the linguists and teachers involved in the Reform Movement (Howatt 1984). Finally, the end of 19th and 20th century, with such representatives as Sweet, Berlitz, Palmer, Krashen or Long, were marked by the development of natural methods of language teaching, audiolingualism, or error analysis. These movements, methods and approaches all slowly but surely led to the exclusion of students' own languages from the classroom and the promotion of *monolingual teaching* (Richards and Rodgers 1986, Howatt and Smith 2014).

21st century, however, brought a breakthrough work of Cook (2001) – a re-examination of the role of own language in the FL classroom. In the last twenty years numerous arguments have been made for the re-evaluation and re-introduction of students' own language in different domains of language teaching. First, the supporting evidence came from the psycholinguistic research showing that languages coexist in the mind and code-switching and code-change are natural for bi- and multilinguals (Oblor 1982, Beauvillain and Graninger 1987, Locastro 1987, Cook 1993). Second, Stern (1992) argued that *monolingual* and *bilingual* teaching are actually two sides of the spectrum on which teachers move freely, depending on the objectives of a given lesson. Third, the use of translation in new language teaching has been re-evaluated (Stern 1992, Widdowson 2003, Hall and Cook 2012). Fourth, the sociolinguistic perspective also started to be taken into consideration, accounting for learners' cultural backgrounds, the undeniable burden of British imperialism, and the status of native versus non-native teachers of English (Philipson 1992, Atkinson 1993, Cook 2001, Widdowson 2003,

Cook 2010). Fifth, evidence from the fields of Second Language Acquisition and recently neurolinguistics and neuroimaging research revealed the impossibility of separating different languages in a human mind (Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008, Bialystok 2009, Gullberg 2011), the advantages of code-switching in bi- and multilinguals (Cook 2010, Nikula 2007), and that learners' own language and the learnt language actually trigger or suppress different emotions (Jończyk et al. 2016, 2019). Sixth, it has been shown that students' own languages are used in classrooms around the world (Hall and Cook 2012, Hall and Cook 2013) and it is a state of affairs which cannot be denied regardless of what the literature advises. In fact, teachers' code-switching in some environments was reported to help create a safer space for students, appreciate the value of national languages, promote multilingualism, and open more educational possibilities (Hall and Cook 2012). Finally, with the recent *Multilingual turn*, changes in the language classrooms around the world and the multilingual condition being the default one in the ever-evolving societies, using more than one language in classrooms is becoming a standard.

Considering all the above, the current research project is an investigation of the practices and attitudes regarding the use of learners' own language in the classroom by Polish teachers of English. The study followed a mixed-method design. In line with Lynch (2015), two variables were tested: teachers' work experience (in years), and the level of taught groups. To ensure data triangulation, a survey based on Cook and Hall (2012) and Scheffler et al. (2017) was conducted on a large, representative group of teachers, followed by interviews and lesson observations of a chosen group of teachers. Additionally, to obtain a holistic picture of the investigated problem, six teacher-trainers employed in leading universities in Poland were interviewed. The results of the study partially confirmed Hypothesis 1: teachers with different work experience were not as different from each other as expected. However, interesting patterns came to light regarding the rift between young student teachers and those who have just started their professional journey, and the already practicing teachers. Hypothesis 2 was fully supported, as across the questionnaire tasks and interviews it has been shown that the lower the level of students, the more Polish is used in the classrooms, and the more it is accepted as a methodological tool. Interviews and lesson observations corroborated the results of the qualitative part of the study and provided more insight into the matter. The results of the study may offer a valuable contribution to classroom research as well as spark discussion about systematizing the issue of own language use in student-teachers' education.