

## **Chapter III**

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Overall Design**

As mentioned earlier, this study makes use of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms for data collection and analysis with the purpose of answering the research questions restated below. The nature of the overall design emerged as a result of the researcher's own personal experiences in EFL and SFL in combination with research of previous studies mentioned in Chapter I.

The present research aims to answer three main questions:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of EFL learners, teachers, and coordinators towards the use of the MT (i.e. Spanish) in the EFL classroom?
2. For what purposes do EFL teachers use the MT in the EFL classroom (i.e. giving instructions, teaching grammar, providing vocabulary translation, setting up pair/group work, classroom management)?
3. For what purposes do EFL learners use the MT in the EFL classroom (i.e. addressing the teacher, addressing their peers, asking for clarification, asking for word meaning)?

#### **3.2 Population and Sample Selection**

Mexico is a country where EFL has grown rapidly during the last two decades, especially since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) started. In addition, its proximity to an English-speaking country and the era of globalization that we are living has spread the teaching of EFL from private to public schools and rural areas.

Within this country, the city of Puebla provides certain characteristics that make it suitable for a big demand of EFL teaching and learning. For instance, it is a cosmopolitan city, near the country's capital (Mexico City), which, among other characteristics, is known for being a university city, hosting one of the biggest public and some of the best-rated private universities in the country. As a result, it hosts thousands of future professionals who are in need of learning English as a Foreign Language in order to increase their opportunities in the working field or to continue studying abroad. Foreseeing such need, most universities in Puebla do not allow undergraduates to leave school without certifying their English level of proficiency through standardized tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC, and others, making it mandatory for students to take a certain amount of language courses.

The sample selected for this study comes from three major universities in the city of Puebla, Mexico -- two private and one public. Although there was no particular reason for the amount of universities selected, these three institutions were chosen based on the similarity of their EFL teaching system and by the large amount of students enrolled in each one.

From each university two groups were selected: one basic English language class and one advanced English language class, being a total of six groups and their teachers the selected sample for this study. It is important to mention at this point that the researcher purposefully selected participant teachers who were non-native English speakers (NNS) in order to not introduce that variable in this study. In addition, the coordinators of EFL in each institution were also part of the study. From the four participant coordinators (there were two coordinators in one of the institutions), two were NS and two were NNS, a fact that was not considered a variable for this study.

### **3.2.1 Participants**

#### **3.2.1.1 Participant Universities**

##### *University 1*

It is a private university which offers 23 undergraduate and 19 graduate programs where approximately 2,000 EFL students are enrolled every semester. It is mandatory for all undergraduate students to certify their English level of proficiency through a standardized test in order to graduate and, therefore, they are offered four language courses of a four-month period each to reach that level. The requirement for graduation at this university is a minimum of 500 points in the institutional TOEFL, 650 in the TOEIC, or an equivalent.

##### *University 2*

It is a private university that offers 52 undergraduate and 47 graduate programs. In what refers to EFL students, more than 1,500 students are enrolled in the different levels offered by the Department of Languages every semester; during the fall semester of 2007, 1603 students were enrolled in EFL courses. At this institution, it is also mandatory for all undergraduate students to certify their English level of proficiency in order to graduate by reaching the equivalence of 500 points in the institutional TOEFL. In order to achieve this, they are offered three university level language courses of a four-month period each. If students enter with an English proficiency level below 400 on the TOEFL, they are obliged to take from one to three (depending on their level) non accredited pre-university level courses also of four months each in order to reach at least a 400 score in TOEFL or equivalent and be able to enroll in the three accredited university level courses offered.

### *University 3*

It is a public university which offers 62 undergraduate and 72 graduate programs. According to its 2007 admission process, it received approximately 11,135 students at the undergraduate level. Similar to the previous universities, English language courses are offered which correspond to required proficiency levels. However, students are not required to certify their English level of proficiency through a standardized test, but only to take four mandatory courses. Furthermore, in any term they have the option to present a “revalidation” test which may place them in a more advanced level or they can show a result of 500 points or more in the institutional TOEFL or an equivalent in order to exempt taking the courses.

The only exception for this is the faculty of languages, in which students are prepared for becoming future language professionals working in the areas of teaching or translation. Therefore, in order to graduate, students are required to achieve a minimum of 550 points in the institutional TOEFL. As a result, students have to take eight courses of four months each, unless they certify before or are placed in a more advanced level.

For its similarity to the two previous universities in what refers to EFL policies, it is the students at the faculty of languages of this university (approximately 300 students per year) that were selected as participants for the purposes of this study.

#### **3.2.1.2 Participant Teachers**

As previously stated, two NNS teachers of each university were observed and interviewed for the purposes of this research: one teaching at the first and one at the last level offered at their institution.

### *University 1*

Teacher 1. Teaching at the basic level, this teacher has studied English for 17 years and taught it for 11 at different institutions and all levels. She has worked with children, teenagers, and university students. She has never either studied or lived in an English-speaking country and has a Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT), as well as several diplomas in a) English Language Teaching (ELT), b) Philosophy for Children, c) In-Service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) from Cambridge University, and d) English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Teacher 2. Teaching TOEFL preparation courses where students work on the necessary skills for accrediting the necessary TOEFL scores, this teacher has taught English for 32 years at all levels, going from basic to standardized test preparation courses such as the First Certificate, TOEFL, and TOEIC. She has a Bachelor's Degree in English language and a certificate of Proficiency in Teaching English. She also has not studied or lived in an English-speaking country and has worked with students from elementary, junior high, high school, and university. She studied French for three years and Hebrew for a few months.

### *University 2*

Teacher 1. Working with students at the basic level, this teacher has a Bachelor's Degree in Modern Languages with a specialty in teaching. She has studied English officially for almost six years and lived in the United States of America for six months. She has been an EFL teacher for approximately seven years at different levels and institutions.

Teacher 2. Teaching at the most advanced level at his institution, this teacher studied English for 15 years while he lived in the United States and has taught it for

approximately eight years. He has worked with high school, undergraduate, and graduate students at private and public schools, teaching at all levels. He has a Bachelor and a Master's Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and has also studied French, Italian, and Chinese.

### *University 3*

Teacher 1. Working with students at the basic level, this teacher studied English for 36 years and did a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics in English while he lived in England. He has taught English as a second language for 28 years at different levels and institutions in the city of Puebla, mainly at the participant university.

Teacher 2. Teaching at the advanced level, she studied English for approximately 10 years, has a major in Chemical Engineering and a Master's Degree in Educational Technology and Communication. She studied two diplomas in Vancouver during the two years she lived in Canada and has taught EFL for 10 years at all levels, but mostly advanced, to high school and university students.

### **3.2.1.3 Participant Coordinators**

#### *University 1*

The coordinator of EFL at this university is a NNS who has been an EFL teacher for 14 years and a coordinator in two occasions, one for a year, and the current one for four years. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Modern Languages with a specialty in teaching and has worked in both, private and public institutions. She has never lived in another country and has studied French at a basic level.

#### *University 2*

There are two coordinators at this institution, one for the basic and one for the advanced levels.

Coordinator 1. The coordinator of the basic level at this university has been an EFL teacher for 31 years and a coordinator at different levels for the same length; two years in a private school and 29 at the participant university. She is a native speaker and has a Master's Degree in Education with a specialty in TESOL and a Doctoral Degree in Language Science. She has lived in the United States of America and taught English as a first language in that country.

Coordinator 2. The coordinator of the advanced level has been a language teacher for 30 years at the participant university and a coordinator for 11. She is a native speaker with a Master's Degree in Education with a specialty in TESOL and a Doctoral Degree in Rhetoric and Linguistics from a university in the United States of America. She has lived in that country and taught English and Spanish for five years while studying for her doctorate.

#### *University 3*

The coordinator of EFL of the faculty of languages at this university has studied English as a Foreign Language since 1981 and has a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Teaching from a university in London through a long-distance program. He has taught EFL since 1985, mainly at the participant university where he has been a coordinator for approximately two years.

#### **3.2.1.4 Participant Students**

The participant students of this research were students enrolled in one group either of an elementary or advanced level at their university during the fall semester of 2007. In total, data was gathered from 44 elementary and 55 advanced students, distributed in the following way.

### *University 1*

Elementary students. There were 11 participant students in this group from which five were male and six female, ranging from ages 18 to 40 and EFL studies from between one and 15 years.

Advanced students. This group consisted of 19 students, 14 female and five male, between ages 19 and 24, who have studied English as a FL between three and 20 years.

### *University 2*

Elementary students. There was a total of 14 students in this group, seven female and seven male, ranging from ages 17 to 22 and having studied EFL between one and eight years.

Advanced students. This was the largest group with 24 students, eight female and 16 male; their ages ranged between 17 and 23 years and they have studied English as L2 between three and 19 years.

### *University 3*

Elementary students. There were 19 students in this group, from which 11 were female and eight male. They were between 18 and 23 years old and have studied EFL between one and nine years.

Advanced students. This group had 12 students, seven female and five male between ages 20 and 24 and with EFL studies ranging from three to 14 years.

## **3.3 Materials**

There were five sources to gather the necessary data for this research project: 1) class observations and field notes, 2) a teacher's interview (see Appendix A), 3) a coordinator's interview (see Appendix B), 4) a teacher's questionnaire (see Appendix C), and 5) a student's questionnaire (see Appendix D). These five sources



were designed by the researcher taking as a model those used in similar studies (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989; Kraemer, 2006; Tang, 2002). The instruments were designed with the aim that the data from one corroborated the data from the others (triangulation) in order to overcome any possible internal value constraints (LeCompte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992).

All the instruments were piloted on a sample of students, teachers, and coordinators that shared similar characteristics with those of this study; these were not considered for the results and conclusions of this research.

### **3.3.1 Class Observations and Field Notes**

As previously mentioned, six class observations were done for the purposes of this research; one for each participant group. The researcher adopted the role of a non-participant observer whose role was limited to taking field notes. The main goal of this ethnographic data collection method was to record the situations in which the MT was used either by the teacher or the students. The classes observed were also tape-recorded with previous authorization from the teacher and the institution, transcribed and further analyzed.

### **3.3.2 Teacher's Interview**

The teacher's interview (see Appendix A) was designed to gather more meaningful and in-depth data from the participant EFL teachers and consisted of 20 questions which mainly focused on the following information:

- Teachers' language background. Basically, the teachers' experience teaching EFL, length of studying English, language learning experience, level of proficiency, teacher training.

- Teachers' teaching methodology. The method(s)/approach(es) they use, how they teach grammar and vocabulary, particularly abstract lexical items.
- Teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards the use of the MT in the EFL classroom. If they use it, when, for what purposes, if they allow their students to use it, when and for what purposes, role of penalization.
- External factors influencing the teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Their school's policies towards the use of Spanish in the EFL classroom, textbook and material used.

As previously stated, because of their nature, the interviews were semi-structured and the items were open-ended, subject to be modified depending on the information provided by the participants at the moment.

### **3.3.3 Coordinator's Interview**

The coordinator's interview (see Appendix B) consisted of 10 questions, which mainly focused on the institution's policy on the use of Spanish (MT) in the EFL classroom, the specification of such policy to the teachers and students, whether there is a penalization for either teachers or students who use the L1, what training the teachers receive, if there is a specific teaching methodology to be followed, among others. The purpose of these interviews was to see how the institutions' policies may influence the use of MT in the L2 classroom in both teachers and learners.

### **3.3.4 Teacher's Questionnaire**

It consisted of twenty items divided into two rating scales in order to avoid time-consuming instruments for the participants. The first part of the questionnaire (see Appendix C) consisted of three items that presented statements in first person

singular that required the EFL teachers to rank from the most (number 1) to the least important (number 8 or 10 depending on the item), a) situations in which they use or allow their students to use the MT in the EFL classroom and b) the reasons for its use. The second part of the questionnaire (items four to 20) asked the EFL teachers to read sentences and choose the appropriate number of a 5-point Likert scale going from “strongly agree” (number 1) to “strongly disagree” (number 5). All 20 items were designed based on previously mentioned theory and empirical evidence on the beliefs and attitudes of the frequency, reactions, situations and usefulness of L1 in the L2 classroom. In addition, some items were presented two or three times restated in different ways in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the participants’ answers.

### **3.3.5 Student’s Questionnaire**

The student’s questionnaire (see Appendix D) also contained 20 items and was also divided into two sections. The first four items from section one provided the students with situations in which they might use the MT in the EFL classroom, reasons for its use, when they would like their teacher to use it, and the amount of L1/L2 they would like to have in the EFL classroom. The remaining 16 items from the second part of the instrument also presented sentences they had to rank from 1 (“strongly agree”) to 5 (“strongly disagree”) on a Likert scale. As in the teacher’s questionnaire, some items were presented twice or three times in a different wording in order to reduce the possibilities for random answers. Once again these sentences were designed based on premises and findings from theory and previous research on this topic.

### **3.4 Procedure**

As previously stated, all the instruments were piloted before their actual administration on a sample that shared similar characteristics to the participant students, teachers, and coordinators, but whose data was not included in the results of the present research. This piloting was done in order to calculate the time of the interviews, check the order of the questions in order to guarantee the fluency of the interviews, ensure the information needed for this research was obtained, and make sure the questionnaires were understandable to the participants.

For the piloting, one teacher, one coordinator, one group of 20 students in elementary, and one group of 20 students in an advanced level were selected from an institution not related to the ones in this study. After the administration of the instruments, the participants were asked their opinion. Based on their suggestions, the format of both the student and the teacher's questionnaire was modified in order to make the items clearer for the respondents. Finally, the coordinator and teacher's interviews were expanded during the actual interviews when the researcher considered it necessary depending on the participants' answers in order to obtain more in depth information.

The next step in order to proceed with the present research was to get the necessary consents of the participant institutions to carry out the research at their facilities. Similarly, letters of consent were given to and signed by the participant EFL teachers and coordinators in which the participants were ensured that they would have total anonymity and that their data would be used only for the purposes of the present research.

None of the participants was informed of the specific purposes of this research until after the data collection in order to avoid biases; nevertheless, they

were given an accurate explanation of the process to follow and a general overview of what the present study was about. Therefore, the instruments were administered only after the class observations were done in order not to influence the participants' regular behavior in the L2 classroom.

The classes and teachers observed were subject to the institution's decisions, based on their availability. When the researcher was able to decide appropriate dates, the selection was done randomly.

Once the permissions were granted and the instruments piloted and modified accordingly, the process of data collection began. First, EFL classes were observed and tape-recorded. The researcher took field notes paying special attention to the situations where the MT was used in the classroom either by the teacher or the students. Secondly, 10 minutes before the observed class was over, the students' and teachers' questionnaires were administered by the researcher. Thirdly, after the observations, the teachers of the observed classes were individually interviewed based on their availability. Finally, the institutions' coordinators were also interviewed. All the interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed.

Once the data was collected, the researcher proceeded to analyze it. As previously mentioned, because of the nature of the instruments, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were carried out. The class observations' recordings and the observer's field notes were analyzed qualitatively, transcribing all the fragments where the MT was used in the EFL classroom by both teachers and students. Constant triangulation was done among the participants' data obtained from the various sources of every institution and across institutions in order to ensure validity.

In addition, the findings were constantly analyzed with reference to those of previous similar research.

For the quantitative data, the central tendency measures (e.g. mean, median, mode) and the dispersion measures (e.g. range, standard deviation) from the teachers' and students' questionnaires data were analyzed using the computer software Microsoft Excel <sup>TM</sup>. To find out whether there were any significant correlations among the data, the statistical computer program GraphPad Instat 3 <sup>TM</sup> was used to perform two kinds of tests: The Kruskal-Wallis test for comparing the data from the three participant institutions and the Mann-Whitney test for comparing groups two by two.

From this information, percentages were calculated and graphs and tables were designed, which are presented in the following chapter. Once again, this analysis was done first by institution and then across institutions, so that the findings were reliable and generalizable.