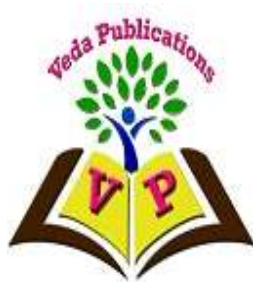




EXPLORING A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM-A METHOD OF USING MOTHER TONGUE IN AN ESL WRITING CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Languages are seen to be existing in watertight self sufficient compartments which share a relation of mutual interference than of an aid. While CUP (Common Underlying Proficiency) (Cummins, 1983) proposes that languages share a mutual space developing a common 'conceptual attributes' as a result of interaction between languages. This when put into practice defeats the popular argument of English only classrooms that criminalize the use of L1 which thereby handicaps the learner by restricting the access to a great resource of learning, i.e., L1. The paper proposes that L1 can be a valuable pedagogic resource in an ESL classroom. It discusses the study in using L1 in ESL writing classroom as a cognitive resource.

Keywords: *Mother tongue, Common Underlying Proficiency, Separate Language Proficiency, L1, L2, Multilingualism.*

Citation:

APA Kumar,N.S.(2018). Exploring A Multilingual Classroom-A Method of Using Mother Tongue in An ESL Writing Classroom.*Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 5(1), 468-472.

MLA Kumar,Nainala Satish." Exploring A Multilingual Classroom-A Method of Using Mother Tongue in An ESL Writing Classroom"*Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.5, no.1, 2018, pp.468-472.

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In the age of globalization of the capital, with the spread of service economy, competence in English language has become must to attain for the development of individuals. Policies and practices regarding the spread of English and the flow of English teaching/learning have been enforced from top down driven by the requirement of the job market determined by Multi-National Companies. These policies are affecting everyday practices in the classrooms situated in metropolis, urban, and even rural areas as well. As part of this policy, an increase in the establishment of schools with English as the medium of language is seen as a vibrant phenomenon beginning from the basic level of education.

The enforcement of English though seems to be providing an opportunity for economic betterment through the development of competent English communicating students, does have otherwise effects on the students and other linguistic and cultural aspects of Indian language classrooms in particular and in the schools of the country in general. The enforcement of English for the better teaching/learning of the language is carried out not only in the classroom but it is also manifested outside the classroom in the school as well as carried in the social life too.

The enforcement comprises various policies and practices including imposing rules and restrictions in and out of the classrooms; such as communicating only in English; abandoning the use of mother tongue; penalizing the use of Mother tongue that results in criminalization of mother tongue which will eventually exercise a negative opinion formation in the young minds on the use of mother tongue as punishable offense. However these practices lack a theoretical ground and exercise damaging effect on the learning process on the whole. Particularly in third world countries like India, which is termed as a socio-linguistic giant with a diverse and rich linguistic landscape, with an emerging or developing economy English only policy, be it as medium of education or use of language in classrooms is exerting adverse effects on the learning and teaching of the other national rather local languages.

Termed as a 'socio linguistic giant', India is a bi/multilingual country at the grassroots level with different societal roles allocated to different languages which are part of complex Indian socio-cultural behavior. In some contexts, each language has a fixed role to play and one language does not compete with another for survival. In other contexts, different languages are used by the same people to fulfill their communicative needs. However with English only policy where in Mother tongue teaching and learning is restricted as another subject, the grass roots multilingualism is put to stake.

Thus the myth of mother tongue as a hindrance to learning of English is not been challenged but rather reinforced. The myth also assumes that in human memory languages exist in water tight compartments that are insulated from each other. Each has to be learnt separately without disturbing the other compartment. This model of understanding of language proficiency is termed as SUP (Separate Language Proficiency). This model gave rise to insulated 'single language' classrooms which prevent skills transfer across languages. Especially in ESL contexts, two languages seem to bear no relation and are taught and learnt separately. This promoted the assumption that the skills and world knowledge acquired through L1 cannot be transferred to L2 and vice versa.

In a review of international bilingual education evaluations, Cummins (1983) proposed an alternative model of bilingual proficiency termed as Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP), in other words interdependence hypothesis. It is posited that CUP explained successfully the phenomenon of 'conceptual attributes' which have developed as a result of interaction between languages, i.e. L2 with L1. With this, it has been argued that literacy-related aspects of a bilingual proficiency in L1 and L2 are seen as common or interdependent across languages. CUP reinforces an understanding that the languages are not separate systems with quartered spaces inside the head of an individual, but tools used to fulfil similar or different functions. However, language classrooms in India exist as watertight, self-sufficient 'system based' compartments that do not even recognize, let alone provide mutual spaces for languages to interact with each other. This isolating,



prescriptive view of language can be traced, at one level, to monolingual assimilationist language paradigms. In India it can also be traced to the left over legacy of a migrant yet super-ordinate community. One outcome of this compartmentalization /prescriptivism is that the use of the L1 in the English classroom is like the use of a white lie; inevitable, but while it cannot be avoided, it is never advocated.

C.U.P (COMMON UNDERLYING PROFICIENCY)

This model strengthens the argument that the experience of any language learning can contribute to developing the underlying proficiency, provided adequate motivation and exposure to the languages in school or in society. This model as presented by Cummins is compared to "a dual iceberg in which common lingual proficiency underlies the obviously different surface manifestations of each language" (Cummins & Swain, 1986: 87). In general, surface features of L1 and L2 are linguistic features that are less cognitively demanding and constitute the label of a concept whereas the underlying proficiency is that involved in cognitively challenging and demanding activities.

Facilitating a base for learning languages, CUP gets expanded, which can exert beneficiary effects on both languages. Cummins (2000), in this context, states: "Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible." In other words, if a student is familiar with and understands the concepts in one language i.e., in her/his own language, it will not be hugely difficult for her/him to learn the labels in another language whereas it can create hurdles if (s)he has to learn both the concept as well as the label in the other language (L2). This theory explains successfully why it is easier for adults to learn additional languages. From the above discussion, it can be inferred that the CUP is not language-specific. This theory asserts that cognitive and literacy skills in the mother tongue or L1 can be transferred across languages which is the primary argument of this project. This representation of bilingual proficiency would also suggest that a continued conceptual and linguistic development in the first language helps in learning a second language or another language.

In Indian ESL classrooms the teaching practice governed by English only principle while negating the use of the mother tongue is negating the fact that a child brings along a bank of knowledge with him in mother tongue. The '*immediate atmosphere*' of the mother tongue in which children grow up is denied access as a result the children in ESL classroom are abandoned from a wealth of resource.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF L1 IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

An individual's mother tongue is associated with various factors of human dignity and self-assertion. An L1, along with the language skills, also brings a variety of elements of assertion of a distinct identity of a distinct culture and also self-respect of human beings to fore front in the ESL classroom. So, the L1 brings with it cultural, societal and psychological features associated to it in the ESL classroom needs to be considered, recognized and used for the benefit of the learners.

The mother tongue is considered as one of the primary means of expression of an individual. A learner, in the early years of her/his life, functions in the society in the mother tongue for the fulfilment of all basic societal and cultural needs. This is instrumental in grounding or firmly rooting the learner deeply into a societal identity with a distinct culture. This bond-between a learner and the mother tongue, is strengthened in the early years of a child. Even after learning a second language, people identify themselves with their mother tongue only. Hence, a mother tongue anchors child to the culture. As a child grows up in an immediate atmosphere of her/his mother tongue, the early concept formation in the child happens in the L1. In the later stages of life, by means of 'accommodation' and 'assimilation', the formed-world knowledge (knowledge of concepts) extends as (s)he is exposed to the world. During the processes, old concepts formed through L1 might be negated completely or modified, reformulated/restructured/ reshaped into new concepts through the primary means of expression. Moreover, in the early learning years of a child, the entire system of language is operated in her/his L1. The earlier foundation laid by the mother tongue acts as a base for further learning and also to build the superstructure of language.



If the L1 is recognized and prominently used in the L2 classroom, all the features associated with become valuable pedagogic resources. Such recognition of the learner with special reference to her/his identity, background knowledge and ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity results in an emotional satisfaction of the students. Mohanty (2007) indicates that the use of mother tongue maximizes the utilization of cultural, linguistic and conceptual resources in an ESL classroom. In this regard, UNESCO (1958) recommends that a child learns faster/better through her/his mother tongue.

The mother tongue also increases learner comfort by reducing the affective factors and facilitates easy and free communication between students and also with the teacher enabling better learning of any language in general, a language skill in particular. The use of L1 also supplements the gaps in learning another language, in this context L2. Thus, the use of L1 gives a 'greater access to education' and 'equal opportunity to participate in national reconstruction' (Pattanayak, 2007: V).

The traditional approach to foreign language teaching has treated L1 as a source of interference and discouraged its use. This attitude is changing. If L1 is not used in the classroom, students are 'stripped of their cultural rootedness and their primordial pride' and leads to 'intellectual impoverishment and emotional sterility and cultural blind spot' (Pattanayak, 2007: ix). If prohibited, the L1 also impedes the processes of 'accommodation' and 'assimilation.' Above all, it is violation of the linguistic human rights. (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1995) At this juncture it is relevant to recall that the notion that learning an additional language exerts negative influences has been strongly challenged. In fact, the possession of an additional language is like equipping oneself with another tool to survive comfortably. This tool can also be used as a scaffold to help build the 'language tool', namely the second or other language that is being learnt.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

With regard to the strategy transfer across languages, a body of literature suggests that strategies of reading as well as writing can be transferred from L1 to L2 or the other language. With particular reference to productive skills, i.e., writing

previous studies say that writing in English is 'a comfortable bilingual activity' since a child's concept formation happens in their primary means of expression-the first language and by means of 'accommodation'/'assimilation' extends to the second language. Moreover, in the early learning years of a child, the entire system of language (syntactic, semantic, phonological, etc) is operated in her/his L1. The learners enter the ESL classroom with a more enabled language that can serve as a valuable pedagogic resource.

ROLE OF L1 IN ESL WRITING INSTRUCTION

Research in ESL composition has already proved that students use their L1 while composing in L2 (Akeyl, 1994; Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Friedlander, 1990; Lay, 1982; Qi, 1998; Uzawa & Cumming, 1989; Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Wolfersberger, 2003; Woodall, 2002). However, the nature of L1 investigated in these studies is largely incidental and self-initiated by students. Using think aloud protocols research studies in the last decade proved successful in investigating the purposes for which L1 is used. Some of these purposes are; generating ideas (Akeyl, 1994; Friedlander, 1990; Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Wolfersberger, 2003; Woodall, 2002), planning and organisation of texts (Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002), evaluating the text produced, process controlling, back tracking either to generate more text or, alternatively to check back on the success of the match between expression and the intended meaning (Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Wolfersberger, 2003), or solving linguistic problems while formulating text (Wang, 2003; Whalen & Menard, 1995). This paper grounding on the findings of these studies further proposes the deliberate use of L1 for the said purposes above to teach writing in the second language-English. Both, teacher and the students will use the L1 in a planned manner in different phases of writing: generation and organisation of ideas, discussion while writing, and revision.

This proposition is tested in an MPhil study with the title 'Use of L1 as a resource in ESL writing instruction' (2011)' with the above mentioned purposes/stages of L1 in ESL writing has yielded a better scripts with many a signs of growth. Growth in



writing capability can be seen broadly as general growth in writing proficiency, and particularly in syntactic and semantic gains, or increased complexity of content. These categories of growth included fluency (text length and number of T-units), syntactic complexity (MTUL: Mean T-unit length), semantic complexity (introductory/stance making statements, reasoning statements, and concluding statements), and linguistic complexity and variety (intra-sentential elements, noun phrases and verb phrases)

It was concluded that unlike the role of the mother tongue (hence forth referred as L1) in teaching English (hence forth referred as L2) writing that is normally restricted to the translation of sentence structures and grammatical rules, the pedagogic value of the cognitive aspect of L1 can be effectively used to generate ideas, organise, plan and (re)write to produce better quality essays with reference to the number of ideas, organisation, vocabulary and language use. In other words, the use of L1 during the stages of prewriting i.e. brainstorming, for generating ideas, organizing, planning, and composing and also for consciousness raising would allow the students to generate more elaborate ideas. Consequently this would produce more cohesive and qualitatively better L2 texts with enhanced language use.

This paper concludes with a further suggestion that the purposes for which the L1 as pedagogic resource is used can be extended to the other productive skill - speaking as it as a process also involves the same procedure for generating ideas, organizing, planning and composing. However this suggestion exists with a limitation that this can only have fruitful results in terms of planned speech but not unplanned speech.

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