A MOTHER TO KNOW THE OTHER – THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

1Hussaini Irfan. S , 2Dr. S. Jayalakshmi
1Ph.D. Research Scholar (Full Time), Department of English,
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore – 43. irfanresearch2017@gmail.com
2Assistant Professor of English, Department of English,
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore – 43, jayalakshmisubbian@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The mother tongue plays a vital role in the second language classroom. But the teachers in the government schools in India completely replace the use of target language by the mother tongue due to lack of proficiency in the second language and lack of training. However mother tongue could be employed in a more useful ways by giving equal importance to the target language as well. This article provides evidence of the role of L1 in L2 classroom in a mutually productive way.

Keywords: ESL Classroom, Mother Tongue, Bilingualism, Language Transfer,

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Second Language has always been under heated arguments for the past few decades. Many researches had done in this area and new methods are introduced and have also been tried out, to develop the learning of English. Despite the learners in the government schools in India are still not able to pick up English as a second language. Because learners in the government schools in India come from the less privileged/rural background. Most of their parents are illiterate or only studied up to twelfth standard. Most of them are working as coolie. And so they could not support their children for learning English. The only place where the students can get exposure for the language is their schools. The government school teachers tend to take an advantage of using the L1 throughout the class even while teaching L2 (i.e English, in this case). However the use of L1 is needed for the same reasons listed above, without L1 the students could not understand L2 properly. But complete replacement of the use of L2 by L1 leads to no exposure and less proficiency in the L2. Also no properly trained teachers are available to teach English which resulted in less proficient students at the government schools. This article provides evidences of the role of L1 in L2 classroom in a mutually productive way.

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN BILINGUAL MINDS
When a child learns more than one language since his/her early childhood then he/she is referred as a ‘simultaneous bilingual’. On the other hand one who learns another language later in their life is referred as ‘sequential bilingual’ (Lightbown and Spada 2013). Yet “there is no evidence that learning two language substantially slows down their linguistic development or interferes with cognitive development.” (31) Lightbown and Spada (2013) proposed that when children learn second language in the school setting, they needs to learn both the variety of language, that is, the variety that they use among their peer group as well as the variety they use in the academic setting. (31)

Cummins’ Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis “addresses the functional interdependence between the development of L1 and L2 skills” (Cummins 1979, 227). He (1981) suggested that in order to develop children’s CALP in their L2, their CALP in L1 has to be developed first. This is what Cummins calls as ‘Common Underlying Proficiency’ (CUP). Agreeing with Cummin’s theory Thomas and Collier (2002) established that “the strongest predictor of L2 achievement is amount of L1 schooling. The more L1 grade level schooling, the higher L2 achievement” (qtd in. Bylund 72)

Figure 1. The Dual Iceberg representation of Bilingual Proficiency (Khatib 2016)
Cummins used the iceberg metaphor to explain the relationship between two language proficiency. Though the surface features like pronunciation and fluency of different languages might be different yet the underlying cognitive and academic proficiency are same across languages. In short, this hypothesis states that learning one language will help the learning of the other.
Figure 2. The Common Underlying Proficiency Model (Khatib 2016)

To explain this point, Cummins used balloon metaphor. In Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP), blowing either one language will naturally affect both as given in figure 2.

**Significance of the Study:**

Learning second language at the early stage will help the learners to acquire the language easily, which commonly prevails in the mind of the people. On the other hand Lilyy Wong Fillmore (2000) observed that if children are ‘submerged’ in a different language for a long time since their childhood that will be resulted in losing their home language. Wallace Lambert (1981) called this process of attaining one language at the cost of losing the other as **Subtractive bilingualism**. On the other hand **Additive Bilingualism** paves way for learning the second language (L2) without losing the first (L1). The National Educational Policy 2019 states that the learners need to be taught all the subjects through their mother tongue up to standard eight or at least up to standard five. This also supports the use of mother tongue (L1) in learning a second language (L2). In such scenario, it would be feasible to use **Additive Bilingualism** in teaching English.

**LOCALE OF THE STUDY**

The present study focuses on the learners’ needs in the second language classroom. The study was set in a government school in Coimbatore. The school was located in Urumandampalayam, which is a rural area and the students come from this locality. Most of the learners’ parents are working as coolie and are hardly educated. The school contains two blocks: one block has two classrooms for the students and the other is a cooking area for preparing noon meal for the students. The school has only two teachers. One teacher is handling the classes from first to third, and the other teacher who is also the headmistress of the school is handling fourth and
fifth classes. All the students from class first to third shared one classroom and the fourth and fifth students shared the other. This school was selected for the present study through random selection. Proper permission was obtained from the Chief Educational Officer to conduct classes for the students in this school.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Before taking an intervention study a two day classroom observation was done. The teacher handles all five subjects to both fourth and fifth standard students. While handling fourth standard students, she gave either a reading work or a written work to the fifth standard students. And alternatively she handled both the classes. Also, during class hours, whenever she was engaged in other clerical work she gave reading or writing work to the students. The teacher handled a short story in the English period. First she narrated the story to the children in the mother tongue. After narrating the story she helped the students to mark the answers for the questions given at the end of the story. Then she read aloud the questions and the answers marked and asked the students to repeat after her.

After the classroom observation is done an informal interview was conducted to the class teacher regarding the method of teaching, learners’ motivation, assessment method, classroom management etc. The teacher said that the learners cannot understand English, and they even find it difficult to read simple words. She said she would read the question first, following which she would read the answers as well and then she would explain its meaning in the mother tongue. Also she blamed the students that they do not take any personal efforts to study at home. Moreover she blamed the parents that though the teachers repeatedly teach the learners the meaning the parents are not encouraging and making the learners sit and study at home. So the learners forget easily what they learnt at school. After every long festival holiday the children get back to the school with the blank mind. And they will have to restart from the beginning whereas they need to rush to complete the portion as well. And so all our teaching goes in vain.

The class teacher focused the grammar portion only provided in the prescribed text book. And activities provided at the end of each lessons were not conducted properly. Also the teacher blamed the learners for not taking personal interest for learning at home yet she did not attempted to make them understand what they learn at school. She did not explain word meaning to the students while teaching short story. She only gave explanations of each sentence but scolded the students for not understanding the meaning of the questions and the answers. Also being the headmistress of the school, she had to take care of other maintenance and clerical works as well.

INFERENCES OF THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

- Being the headmistress of the school, the class teacher was not able to concentrate more on the learning process of the students.
- She could not take extra efforts to help the students to learn better.
As the school has fewer infrastructures, the teachers could not use any technology in the classroom.
The students need more effective and feasible method for learning English.
Keeping all these in the mind the researcher adopted Additive Bilingual Approach for teaching English as a second language during the intervention study.

INTERVENTION STUDY

Having conducted each class for sixty minutes, totally thirty classes of intervention study was conducted for this study. The students’ prescribed text book was used, with which activities were designed based on the approach. The fourth and fifth standard students were taken as samples for the study, based on quasi-experiment method. This paper exhibits a qualitative assessment of the learners in learning English through Additive Bilingual Approach. Listening and Reading Comprehension were focused in this study. The target language was used to give instructions and to interact with the students as well. The continuous use of target language in the classroom helped the learners listen to it on the daily basis which helped them to slowly comprehend the meaning in different contexts as well.

The Objectives of the Intervention Study:

- To enhance the learners’ ability to read simple words using phonemes
- To develop the learners’ ability to identify letters and utter simple words (Noun, Verb and Adjective)
- To improve the learners’ ability to comprehend the meaning of simple words and sentences.

The first lesson handled was ‘reading for fun’ which was given as supplementary reading in the text book. As the learners had four reading classes for the first lesson the instructor encouraged them to read the story. Each of them read one paragraph. Though they faced great difficulty in reading they attempted to read actively. Also the instructor helped them to identify letters and read them. After having taught English through the additive bilingual approach, the learners could realize their responsibility in learning. Though the learners know they have difficulty in reading they volunteered and attempted to read in the classroom. On the other hand, as the learners are continuously listening to the target language they started following the instructions slowly which helped them to comprehend the meaning as well. As given in figure1, the learners could associate the already existing knowledge in the L1 to understand the L2. The language knowledge (i.e. the conceptual understanding of the objects, place, things, actions etc) of the L1 supports the learners to understand the same in the target language.

After three lessons were taught i.e roughly around twelve hours of teaching, almost all the learners in the class could follow the instructions given in the target language. As the learners kept listening to the target language they slowly started responding to the questions asked and the instructions provided in the classroom. Every time when the learners come across a difficult word or sentence the instructor elicited the meaning from the learners. The learners attempted to find the answer. But sometimes the learners could not find the meaning. So the instructor used actions, objects and pictures which helped the learners to be able to find the meaning.
Figure 2 shows, blowing one language will affect both. Teaching the second language (i.e. English, in this case) through the mother tongue makes possible of the language transfer in the minds of the learners. The language transfer enables the learners to understand the concepts in the target language. As they have existing knowledge in the mother tongue they could easily associate that with the target language to understand any concept or word meaning etc. Slowly they make attempts to find the meaning of different words by trial and error which leads them to an expanded understanding.

Totally six lessons were handled. For each lesson, follow up activities were conducted to develop learners’ comprehension. This would also help the learners to read and understand the content better. The learners were allowed to interact among themselves while doing the follow up activities for having better understanding of the concepts and meaning. For example the learners were divided into groups and asked to read a story. Thirty minutes were given to read the story and ten minutes to discuss among the group members. When a learner has difficulty in reading a word, probably he/she gets help from their group mates. Sometimes learners prefer getting assistance from the peer group because they feel comfortable at negotiating a friend for the meaning that they consumed in their mind. Similarly if two students come up with two different understanding when they discuss among themselves they could negotiate and clarify things better. Such discussion also helps them to understand the actual meaning and to unlearn the meaning that they learnt already as well.

Furthermore the instructor used to have ten minutes informal talk with the students after each hour outside the classroom. During an informal talk the learners would share their experience of learning, their difficulty and they attempts to clarify some doubts as well. This informal talk, in the mean while, was helpful for the instructor to get track of the progress of the learners. Also the instructor used to get feedback from the learners as well which was to provide the needs of the learners. Often the learners would ask the instructor to use the mother tongue (L1) in the classroom completely. However the instructor always maintained the target language although the mother tongue was used to clarify doubts and explain concepts and meaning for better understanding.

DIFFICULTIES FACED DURING THE STUDY

- Though the learners took active participation in learning, the long festival holidays were distracting the learners. Sometimes they totally forget what they learnt so far and get back to school with a blank head.
- After long holidays it would take one or two complete hour to recall the lessons taught earlier. In such situation the instructor has to restart the entire thing from the beginning which led to conduct more hours of teaching.
- On one side the learners would be progressing positively and surprisingly in between few of them take continuous leave which would lead them to fall back from the actual classes.
- The long holidays and continuous leave taking was one of the greatest difficulties faced by both the instructor as well as the learners.
CONCLUSION

The samples selected for the study was from the rural area where most of them come from the less privileged background. Having introduced into the additive bilingual approach, the learners found it difficult to follow the instructions at the beginning. Yet with the help of their mother tongue they could gradually understand the instructions and questions asked in the target language. It also helped them to understand and realize their responsibility in learning. The result of the intervention study might seem to be less but there was definitely an improvement in the learners which the class teacher acknowledged during an informal talk after the intervention study. Despite having all the difficulties, the learners could develop their comprehension ability in the target language. This study was delimited to the samples selected, the text book used, the activities conducted and the number of hours handled for the intervention study.

REFERENCES