

BILINGUALISM – A SANGUINE STEP IN ELT

By

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ABSTRACT

Bilingualism can be used as a teaching aid in teaching and learning English language in an Indian classroom and to improve the language accuracy, fluency, and clarity of learners. Bilingualism can aid the teaching and learning process productively in the classroom. In India, most of the students consider English as a subject rather than a tool of communication. The fear towards English language can be diminished when native and source languages are used comparatively in the classroom. The interest and exposure are the key words for learning a language. Teachers should instill confidence among learners by making the learning process easy and simple. This paper aims at observing and analyzing students' use of bilingualism in various linguistic situations and the process of learning English through bilingualism. The study demonstrates that all learners need a support of the vernacular language in learning English as a second language.

Keywords: Facilitator, Bilingualism, Translation, Accuracy, Learning Process.

INTRODUCTION

Non-native learners learn English through their mother tongue in the way of translating the ideas into English. The grammar- translation method which is still in use in many second-language learning classrooms makes students to speak fluently after having studied the language in an understandable and purposeful way. Most of the teachers make their students to concentrate more on memorizing answers and prepare them well for the examinations rather than for communication. As a result, they score very high marks in their second language examination, but lack confidence to use English as a tool for communication in their life.

Non-native teachers support bilingualism in English learning classroom. But some English teachers argue that using bilingualism is waste of time and advice students to think and speak in English. Communicative approaches to language learning in the 1970s and 1980s considered the use of the vernacular language in the classroom as undesirable. However, recently there is a positive change in the attitude of using bilingualism in classroom. Using bilingualism is considered as a skill, to be used in the classroom to acquire listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Bilingualism, though partially, is a challenging one in the

English learning process, it is highly commendable and achievable. Creating a learning atmosphere for the students will give them confidence in learning English language. The acquisition of English is the need of the hour in India, which projects the learners' academic success in the long run. When the learners are compelled to use only English in the classroom, it results in silencing many learners, with less English proficiency, indirectly which will lead to no development of learning. They feel that their thoughts or opinions are not accepted in the classroom due to their lack of English knowledge. The role of a teacher and a student is interwoven in the learning process of the second language. The learners' first language plays an important role in learning the second language in terms of cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural contexts. This paper is focused on using bilingualism as a teaching aid to learn English as a second language.

The researcher has recognized that using bilingualism in the classroom is a positive representation of the learning process. The study on the respondents has made to understand that teachers should be bilingual in the English classes. Many L2 learners always think most often in their mother tongue (L1) even at the mature level. Bilingualism plays a pivotal role in L2 learning because it is interactive, learner-centered, and promotes learner autonomy.

Literature Review

Bilingualism develops three qualities essential to all language learning: accuracy, clarity, and flexibility (Ross 2000:61). The use of bilingualism in the classroom helps to improve the learners' language skills. The objectives of this paper are to analyze students' observation in using bilingualism in learning English, and to examine the activities which help learners to have awareness in language use. Bilingualism is important in learning English at college level through various classroom activities.

Many researchers thought that being bilingual would hinder a learner's academic, and intellectual development but many recent researches have proved that bilingual brain would be active and responsive to learn new things especially a language. Being bilingual would make a learner to be creative and appreciate the other world and its cultural identity.

Why do students use the vernacular language to learn English in the classroom? According to Harmer (2001:131), a principal cause of the L1 use is required by the activity, if students are linguistically incapable of activating vocabulary for a chosen task. Another reason is that, translation is a natural thing to do in language learning, and code-switching between languages is regarded as a natural developmental process. The amount of L1 use by learners in the English learning classroom will help them to mould their styles and abilities in the learning act. According to Oller & Eilers (2002), bilingual children tend to have a smaller vocabulary in each language they learn than monolingual children in their source language. The acquisition skills among bilingual learners depend upon the proficiency level of their second language learning process (Bialystok & Luk: 2005).

Bilingual students have good amount of balance between their two languages, their overall intellectual development is not stalled. On the other way, it is enhanced (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 2000; Garcia, 2009; May, 2010). Garcia (2009) explains, "Monolingual education has at times been used as a way to limit access and legitimate the linguistic practices of those already in powers" (p.12), and adds that, bilingual education is the only way to educate children in this century. Evidence proved that using bilingualism in

English classrooms would develop the socio-cognitive concepts in the mind of learners, which would be considered as an excellent learning process. It gives confidence to learners, a sense of security and gives an amicable environment for learning English. The pristine use of bilingualism in English classes is to teach and compare grammar, vocabulary, word order and other language aspects in English.

Research Design

This study employed qualitative and quantitative approaches involving classroom observations, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Interviews, observations and questionnaire were used with the aim of seeking answers to the following research questions:

- What is the role of bilingualism in learning English language in the classroom?
- How regularly should bilingualism be used in learning English language?
- What is the attitude of the learners using bilingualism in the classroom?

Hypothesis

Hypothesis of the study is that bilingualism in English language classrooms helps learners to get good exposure to English language. It assists and facilitates learners in the learning process.

Research Methodology and Sampling

50 respondents were taken for the study who had studied Tamil as a medium of instruction till higher secondary. The respondents were from varied social backgrounds with diversity of interest. The researcher personally observed 4 classes of I B.A. Economics in a semi-urban college, Kancipuram District. The respondents were advised to answer the questionnaire and conducted a structured interview with them. The purpose and significance of selecting this college is that, this institution is situated on the outskirts of the city and its houses have 85% first generation learners with vernacular (Tamil medium) background.

Classroom observations, structured interviews and questionnaire were used to find out the use of bilingualism in learning English in the classroom. The data included the interviews with students, questionnaires relating to the use of

bilingualism in the English language classroom. The study was organized and conducted by employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Classroom Observations and Results

Four classroom observations happened with the knowledge of the 2 teachers in two different classrooms. First a professor taught a poem titled 'Stopping by Woods in a Snowy Evening' and she was bilingual, and the second professor used only English for teaching a prose titled 'Father's Help'. The classes were observed by the researcher and 6 items were identified by her to be used before the start of the bilingual classes:

- To give instructions about the lesson
- To explain vocabulary
- To explain expressions
- To explain grammatical rules through the lesson
- To create comfort and make students to learn at ease
- To make learners to understand the importance of learning English effectively.

The observation made the researcher to understand that the teacher who was bilingual could get the attention of the students, and she could develop interest in them to learn vocabulary and grammatical aspects while teaching in the classroom. The teacher who used only English in the classroom could not grab the attention of students, as students had a fear of learning English as a subject or a language.

Structured Interviews and Results

Structured interviews were conducted with 50 respondents from the observed classrooms. The purpose was to find out the reasons of understanding English through bilingualism. The interviews were scrutinized and proved that bilingualism was effective for learning the second language. A sample of the structured interview is given in appendix -1.

The respondents felt that bilingual classroom would lead to open up of an avenue to learn English, and could establish a good rapport between the teacher and students. This rapport has improved the confidence level of the

respondents in terms of learning English in the classroom.

The interviews with the respondents made clear that they felt that bilingualism was essential for a productive learning process. Bilingualism had helped them to improve their reading and writing skills. The respondents also stated that in the initial stage, using bilingualism would be helpful, but in the advanced stages, it would be difficult in the language learning process.

Questionnaire and Analysis

The third method was distributing questionnaire to the same 50 respondents aiming to discover their language learning process, and their dependence on the use of bilingualism in the learning process. This method helped the researcher to get information about the respondents' awareness about bilingualism. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure that the language was easy to understand for the respondents. The researcher cleared the doubts of the respondents, whenever they required.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions divided into three groups. Each group revolved around the practice of using bilingualism in the classroom, in life and in learning English. The result of the responses was analyzed and presented here. A five point Likert Scale was used to analyze the score of the respondents.

This section highlights that the respondents' attitude towards bilingualism in the classroom was appreciative. The respondents felt that they gained confidence to be bilingual in the classroom. They felt that they could learn English grammar when the teacher would teach them in bilingual. They recommended that bilingual should be used regularly for an easy learning of English in the classroom.

Table 1 has proved the hypothesis that when the teacher is bilingual, learners will have self-reliance to learn English. When the grammar is being taught with the help of the source language, the comparison helps students to learn English quickly. Sense of humor is very appreciative in the classroom especially when the fun-filled environment is tinged with target and source languages. Students' confidence level is high when they feel that they could learn another language through their own tongue. This confidence increases and encourages them to learn

Item	No	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
Bilingualism is helpful in learning English in the classroom	50				7	43
Teacher should be bilingual while teaching grammar.	50			5	10	35
Teacher should be bilingual while creating fun in the classroom.	50				6	44
Bilingualism should be used regularly to learn English easily in the classroom	50			5	10	35
I gain confidence to learn English in a bilingual classroom	50			3	10	37

Table 1. Bilingualism in Classroom (Q 1-5)

English gleefully.

Thoughts can be communicated with the help of a language. When the thoughts are expressed and understood in source and target languages, the learners can develop the target language (i.e. English language) with the help of the source language. 46 respondents stated that they were highly benefited from media where bilingualism was frequently used in programmes and advertisements. The respondents acknowledged that they could improve their English vocabulary and pronunciation easily through media.

Technology had helped the respondents to develop their English through TV, computer, and mobile SMS. The respondents had learnt English words even after their classroom through TV and mobile. All the government college students were given a free laptop, and all the houses were provided with a free TV that were part of the election manifesto of the Tamil Nadu Government. Above all, most of the college students in Tamil Nadu have mobile phones through which they communicate, and message in English or 'tenglish' (Tamil and English) frequently.

The respondents felt that bilingualism improved their confidence in learning the language. Bilingualism is highly prevailed in the visual media too, which is a powerful tool

Item	No	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
Bilingualism in media helps to learn English words and pronunciation	50				4	46
I prefer to use only my mother tongue	50	33	10	07		
I often translate ideas from L1 into L2	50	2	2	1	10	35
I use bilingual dictionary to know meanings of unknown words	50	2	1	2	10	35

Table 2. Thinking in Bilingualism (Q6 – 9)

for learning the language. 96 percent advertisements, programmes use English and Tamil that helped the respondents to learn English words and pronunciation easily.

Media helps learners to develop English as Brinton (2001) supposed that multimedia tools serve as an important motivator in the language teaching process because "media materials can lend authenticity to the classroom situation, reinforcing for students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world" (p. 461).

Table 2 has proved that Media is a powerful tool in learning English and it is an emerging tool in higher education. Every student is confident enough to access media, and as a result, he or she has good exposure to languages. Advertisements play a significant role through which students learn new words and their pronunciation easily. Most of the students speak Tamil with the code-mixing of English in their day-to-day life. Ironically, the present generation does not understand chaste Tamil. Using dictionary in the classroom will enhance the vocabulary of the students.

The survey proved that using bilingualism in the classroom is praiseworthy. The respondents felt that they could learn English with the help of bilingualism. All the respondents claimed that English is considered to be important, to settle in a 'good' job, and it is a passport for a better prospect. None of the respondents were comfortable with English. All the respondents were comfortable with bilingualism in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. 45 respondents strongly agreed that they would find difficult to

Item	No	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
English is very important in the present world	50					50
English is important to get a good job.	50					50
I am comfortable with Bilingualism	50				2	48
I find it hard to use and understand some English terms or words out of the context	50				05	45
I use mother tongue to learn English language	50				05	45
I fear in making mistakes while speaking English	50				1	49

Table 3. Bilingualism for learning English (Q10-15)

understand hard words in English out of the context. 45 respondents strongly agreed that using mother tongue in acquiring English language would be benefitted. 49 respondents stated strongly that they would fear in making mistakes while speaking English. When the learners are getting motivated and encouraged, this method is a fruitful one. For decades it has been proved that English can be learnt by one's mother tongue. A lot of focus on English and native language in the classroom will make the learners learn the second language effectively

Table 3 helps the researcher to prove the hypothesis that Students' community strongly believes that English is very essential in this world. Students, especially rural students, understand English but unable to communicate confidently. They have fear of making grammatical mistakes, which has engulfed since their school days. Most of the students are comfortable, and use English very easily rather than their source language. For example, respondents uttered 'bus latetu' [Bus is late] thinking they were communicating in Tamil though the sentence contained only English words expect a Tamil word 'tu'. The study makes it very clear that English plays an important role in every rural student's life knowingly or unknowingly.

Findings and recommendations

The study has proved that using bilingualism in the classroom would help students to understand the concept clearly and easily. Bilingualism is more effective, and it is time consuming in the classroom. It is quite obvious that the use of bilingualism in the classroom will facilitate the learners to learn the second language. Language can be learnt through practice, not merely by understanding the concept of the language. Bilingualism helps students to develop divergent thinking. Bilinguals have good metalinguistic awareness. Metalinguistic awareness is analyzing the language and its forms. It can be further demonstrated at different levels: phonological awareness, word awareness, and syntactic awareness. Bilinguals have the advantage of understanding the sound units and word awareness to differentiate sounds, form and meaning of words. The level of syntactic awareness is high among bilinguals, as they can judge the grammatical acceptability sentence of a given language.

The data show that all the students are quite positive about the use of the mother tongue in English classes, but the amount of it depends on the learners' proficiency in English. The respondents were positive in using mother tongue, but preferred less usage in improving their communicative skill. Students are longing and interested to speak in English, but blockage of making mistakes deter them to do so. Many students have understood that, 'Necessity is the mother of invention', and taken enough steps to hone their English skill by listening to English news and Tamil news consecutively.

English language is regarded as the established language of every developing country. The language plays an indispensable role in every one's life. English is taught as a second language, and it is not just limited to an educated but also to a layman. Though the respondents studied in source language till higher secondary, they randomly know at least 500 English words. Mastering a language can turn out to be tough, but once mastered it would be extremely rewarding. Learning English through Tamil will motivate the students to learn more, and help them to keep themselves on track.

The respondents improved their English vocabulary through a good amount of exposure to TV. The source of exposure to English includes Films, TV shows, and radio. The respondents stated that media like newspapers, television, movies, and radio are some of the sources for them to learn English. The media in Tamilnadu extensively uses English and Tamil equally. The exposure through the media also facilitates learners to learn English and use it in their daily communication like, 'I am a Complan Boy', 'Boost is the secret of my energy', 'Life is beautiful' and so on.

The result of the present study shows that, bilingualism in English language classrooms help learners to communicate well in English language. Bilingualism assists and facilitates the learners to communicate better in English language. Use of bilingualism in the classroom should be properly channelized, so that the exposure would help the learners to understand the importance of the vernacular and English language equally. Proper, moderate, and judicious use of bilingualism can facilitate the learners to learn English effectively. Bilingualism is a teaching aid where learners can share anything with others confidently. The

learners strongly believe that knowing English is a passport for a better future in the employability arena. Though saying this, when the learners are from vernacular medium, they consider first language and the second language are complementary in the learning process. Students feel motivated when they learn in a familiar environment. All the college students in India do understand the importance of English language, and try their best to hone their communicative skills. The interest and exposure always helps a learner to whet his language skills. Teachers should choose the teaching materials which would suit the needs of the learners. They should motivate the learners to speak in English. It is the duty of an English teacher to make students understand that English is not a subject to be frightened, but a language to be used effectively.

Conclusion

Many learners are positively relying on their mother tongue in learning English. The use of L2 in classes depends on learners' proficiency, and linguistic situations. The research findings show that students like to use mother tongue in English learning classrooms, and bilingualism helps students to learn English and it facilitates linguistic development of the learners effectively.

Students, especially college students, use English language in different domains for different situations. Elite people use English language in all the domains except with the lower strata of people around them. Today's India has different face for English language, as many consider English as their mother tongue. English is nativized in the Indian environment. People, especially college students, in rural areas have fear towards English as they consider English as a subject, and not as a language for communication. Motivation and necessity play important roles in learning English at college level. Most of the rural students learn English through their mother tongue, which is considered to be a successful attempt.

Appendix - 1

1. Will bilingualism lead you to open many avenues in learning English as second language?
2. Do you think that bilingual would help you to develop a good rapport with teachers?
3. Is your confidence increased in learning English through bilingualism?
4. Do you think bilingualism is essential for a productive learning process?
5. Do you think bilingualism is helpful in the initial stage or advanced stage of learning English learning process?

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