



Research Paper

English

Role of Mother Tongue in Teaching-Learning English

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ABSTRACT

Most of the fortunate children of the world listen to the voices of their mothers first than anybody else's soon after they see the first light of the day. It is therefore, obvious that the mother's voice which is generally acclaimed as mother-tongue creates a great impact on the children. When the children start learning they understand, remember, realize, react and reflect in their mother-tongue better and faster. But to cope with the globalised world afterwards they become bilingual and then multilingual. In the process they foster linguistic, cultural and intellectual vigor. The linguistic experience in the home becomes the foundation of their future learning. Indeed, this paper purports to establish an argument that the role of mother-tongue in teaching English is immensely significant. It further attempts to examine students' perceptions of the use of mother tongue in various linguistic situations and the educators' role in teaching English with the prevalence of mother-tongue over languages.

KEYWORDS

multilingual, prevalence, L1, L2, proficiency

Introduction

The state-of-the-art teaching of English as a foreign language emphasizes the teaching English through English only. Mastering this language seems to be a tough proposition for many of us. Further the use of mother tongue in English classes' sounds inappropriate and therefore, be avoided. In spite of all efforts our students are in capable of gaining proficiency of speech and writing and are still underrated. Many linguists disapprove and discourage the use of mother tongue in language class room. It is often said that the use of mother tongue in English Language Teaching (ELT) demonstrates the low level of proficiency of the teachers. Indeed, this paper purports to establish an argument that the role of mother-tongue in teaching English is immensely significant. It further attempts to examine students' perceptions of the use of mother tongue in various linguistic situations and the educators' role in teaching English with the prevalence of mother-tongue over languages.

Indeed, there is an opinion that rigidly eliminating or limiting the native language doesn't appear to guarantee better acquisition, nor does it foster the humanistic approach that recognizes learners' identities' (Mattioli, 2004:24). English Language teaching in 1970s and 1980s with the communicative approach i.e. teaching English in English did not include the usage of mother tongue and prohibited its use in the class room. This idea of avoiding mother tongue stands insignificant in Indian context. Conceiving original ideas in MT in Step-1, translating the ideas into English in Step-2 and expressing them in English in Step-3 probably serve a great deal in teaching and learning English. Communicative approaches to language learning were conventional and the use of mother tongue was considered to be undesirable. But recently the attitude to mother tongue has undergone a positive change .The importance of the use of MT in English class room is proved to be essential for better understanding of the subject and its essence. But the amount of vernacular language required by the students depends on their proficiency and linguistic situations. A survey report appeared on the BBC teaching English website that there were 641 respondents in this research. Out of the total respondents 21% use only English, 58% sometimes use mother tongue, 8% frequently, 7% most of the time, 6% about half the time. Further it has been noticed that when dealing with monolingual groups of students it seems futile to pretend that the MT doesn't exist. In Indian context the students too rely on L1 quite in good number. The

influence of mother tongue is deeply imbibed in them from the very childhood. Besides the class rooms, they mostly hear their native language being spoken around them, so they lack motivation in learning English language.

English as an international language has got worldwide acknowledgement. Communication through English has become necessity these days. Thus, teaching English communication has become a great challenge for the teachers of our generation. Further, in non-English countries where the predominance of mother tongue is very high, teaching and learning English encounters a lot of difficulties. When English is treated as an international language, its horizon expands beyond the confinement of specific civilization. Mc Kay rightly says "it is reasonable that the way in which this language is taught should not be linked to a particular culturally influenced methodology; rather the language should be taught in a manner consistent with local cultural expectations" (Mc Kay 2002:118).

To master this language a learner needs high exposition. The teacher too should have a greater degree of experience to go with an incredible swiftness with the first changing pedagogy. During teaching the teachers need to acclimatize the students to the demands of their time. They need to initiate interaction among students in the class room in L2 with a flexibility to use L1. For better understanding of the subjects, resorting to mother tongue is no mistake. In other words mother tongue makes students more comfortable and confident. J. Harbord justifiably says " If students are unfamiliar with a new approach, the teacher cannot or will not give an explanation in L1 may cause considerable student de-motivation" (Harbord 1992: 352).

Even for a non-native teacher, it takes a lot of time to explain a difficult word in English which probably less time consuming in vernacular . But frequent use of mother tongue in language class is inadmissible. Studies display a general agreement on the moderate use of MT in L2 learning.

Use of mother tongue in English classroom in India

It is observed that excessive use of Hindi in India English classroom trim down interest. Therefore, a bottom line has to be drawn and beyond that the use of mother tongue is inadmissible. Survey shows that more than 97% schools in India the medium of instruction is its regional language. But in higher

education the medium becomes English. So after 10 long years of study in vernacular, the students shift to colleges and universities where they step into a different medium of instruction that hinders quick adoption.

Our students and teachers face some common difficulties in English classroom. Indian students when attempt to speak and write in English they fumble and hesitate to move forward due to the apprehension of committing mistakes and criticism. They expect their teachers speaking in vernacular language.

Observation and Findings

There is a category of students dither to speak in English due to the pronunciation problem and fear of sarcastic remark by their fellow classmates. Mostly pronunciation gets affected when mother tongue influence dominates over the appropriate pronunciation. Often this mother tongue influences the proper accent. Even sometimes the regional dialects influence linguistic accuracy and correctness.

Some weak students feel inferior to speak in English with their friends who are better in speaking English than them. This lack of confidence pulls them back. A few students are seen using mother tongue deliberately in English class room because they feel proud of their native language. They consider using languages other than their own blasphemous. Some others do not open up their mouth in the class due to introversion. They think in vernacular language, translate into English applying their cognitive reserve but do not speak. This is probably due to the lack of practice at the primary, secondary and even at the college and university level.

A study reveals the fact that out of 30 students in an English class at Engineering level in Odisha, India, 25 students appreciated a teacher who used Hindi and Odia while explaining concepts. Remaining 5 students preferred the teacher explaining the similar concepts in simple English.

Elucidation

As a step towards effective language teaching a teacher needs to create interest and love for the language among the students. To drive away the fear –factor, the teacher should logically prove the easiness of English language. He has to justify how English is easier to speak, read and write than other regional languages even than the mother tongue. The teacher should encourage the students to open up their mouths with a few words in English and subsequently accelerate the habit of speaking, reading and writing. While teaching English the teacher needs to invite participation and ensure the participation of the weakest student of the class so as to enhance confidence among the students. Another way to make the students involved in this business is to initiate talk on interesting topics in class. Group discussion on simple topics of students' interest can thus be the effective method to enhance English learning. Reading English magazines of choice, browsing internet, chatting through social networking channels, watching T.V programmes in English, listening radio, listening the recorded speeches of good speakers can help a great deal in enhancing English speaking and writing ability.

However, a teacher plays a vital role in developing a student's English proficiency. In class the teacher should accept all the answers and explanations of the students even though they are wrong and thereby encourage them to involve in the process of teaching-learning. Correction of errors hardly takes any time for the teachers but generating passion for learning English is time consuming and a big challenge.

So the teacher in India should utilize the resources properly and try to make the best use of opportunities available in our educational setting.

Conclusion

It is evident from the aforesaid discussion that the use of mother tongue in teaching and learning English is inhabita-

ble. In a steady process the students at different level foster linguistic, cultural and intellectual vigor. The linguistic experience in the home often becomes the foundation of their future learning. Thus, instead of using mother tongue frequently all through the class, the teachers very sensitively, judiciously and methodically handle it in monolingual, bilingual and multilingual classes with care and concern. The well-directed and appropriate use of lexical and syntactic balance between the mother tongue and English promotes retention and strengthens the understanding of the historical affinity of language and culture.

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Declaration

I declare that the paper Role of Mother Tongue in Teaching-Learning English submitted for publication in your esteemed journal is an original work and has not been published anywhere else.

Profile in Brief

Chittaranjan Bhoi, MPhil, PhD (Utkal) is a teacher, researcher, translator and a bilingual poet. He has published widely in refereed international and national journals. Dr. Bhoi is presently working as Vice-Principal, Hi-Tech College of Engineering, Odisha. He is having more than 18 years of teaching experience in different colleges of Odisha. He is in the Editorial Board of The Criterion, International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL) and a few others.