

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCAFFOLDING OF LEARNER-LEARNER INTERACTIONS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Learner – learner interactions in the ESL classroom is a necessity for the development of the learner. However, the prioritization of obsolete teaching methods has resulted in the abandonment of learner-learner interaction in the local ESL classroom. The research was conducted with the intention of gauging the significance of learner- learner interaction in the ESL classroom of a government university in Sri Lanka. The roles played by input, interaction and output in forming a competent L2 learner were scrutinized in the research. The research was conducted for twenty first year undergraduates of the Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka. Interviews and questionnaires were provided to obtain the effectiveness of the application of learner- learner interaction in the ESL classroom. The findings of the research prove that learner-learner interaction through translanguaging fluidly occur in the ESL classroom while assisting the research participants to drastically maximize their communicative potential.

Keywords: ESL, learner-learner interaction, scaffolding

1. Introduction

Learner-Learner interactions in the second Language classroom is a vital necessity as it has positive consequences. Many L2 learners in Sri Lanka follows only what is taught by the teacher, which is also known as the banking concept of education. However, researches have proven the fact that learner-learner interactions facilitate inter language development of the L2 learners. It is evident that interaction accelerates the process of comprehension on one level and it also scaffolds the acquisition of speech. Inter language as introduced by Selinker is identified as a linguistic system that all L2 learners display when learning a second language which is connected to both the learner's L1 and L2. Translanguaging could be defined as the usage and fluency of learners between languages. Moreover, scaffolding and interactions between the peers is perceived as more effective than teacher-learner interactions since a peer can understand another peer in a better manner compared to the teacher. Many scholars, including Vygotsky has manifested that the interaction between the learners assists them to develop an egocentric speech of his/her own. Furthermore, Inter language is a process that gradually develops over time and translanguaging could be experienced vividly and is excusable since inter language is a negotiation between two languages. Focus on form is also crucial as it continuously

reshapes inter language. The more the L2 learners focus on form, the output becomes linguistically accurate. Besides the L2 learners should be given the opportunity to identify differences of their inter language(s) before the teacher intervenes. Additionally, both the teacher and learners do have a positive impact on the other learners. The input, interaction and output hypotheses should also be given attention when the teacher instructs the L2 learners (input) that they should be given the space to interact with each other. Hence, the students should be given more activities including group work and role plays. The interaction allows them to discuss, share and compare their knowledge and validate their accuracy. This leads the learner to find a balance between semantics and syntax in order to produce the outcome. Thus, it could be concluded that second language teachers should promote learner-learner interaction by giving due importance to scaffolding, interlinking and translanguaging. It is noteworthy that many research participants are not adequately competent in English. All the research participants were Buddhist monks and their exposure to English is limited both inside and outside of the university. This was similar even during the *pirivena* education where English education was not properly received. Many have developed a strong disinclination towards learning English based on the experiences at the *pirivena* education. It is undeniable that most of the students loathe learning English based on their prior experiences. Rote learning practices that young Buddhist monks are forced to follow to teach subjects like Sanskrit and Pali are also used to teach English in *pirivena* education. Surprisingly, this mundane method of teaching a second language is still appreciated in secondary monastic education and sometimes even in tertiary education. Productivity and practicality of the methods utilized in the ESL classroom of *pirivenas* were not analyzed since recently. A seemingly otherization of ostracizing the ESL learner through teaching methods is conspicuous in *pirivena* education through the amalgamation of foreign examples that the learner is not familiar with. Prada's dogma that "when languages are presented as foreign or second, learners are socialized into the notion that the target language is less pertinent to their everyday realities" (Prada,J,2018,pg.10). Many undergraduates don't identify the relevance of English to their realities is apt to describe the aforementioned issue in monastic education in Sri Lanka. The very idea of language learning through peer conversation is not even attempted in many *pirivenas* since the dialogues between learners is not appreciated and encouraged.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted for first year undergraduates at a state university in Sri Lanka. Twenty students who follow a Diploma course (internal) in English were selected for the study. These learners were from different geographical locations in the country. Two activities were administered to the students. first one was a group activity whereas the second was an individual activity. The success of the second activity was entirely predicated on peer interaction. Upon completion of the two activities, the students were given a questionnaire and voluntary students were interviewed by the researcher to gather information about their different perceptions on the two activities and impact of the activities conducted. Further, the research participants were inquired whether the ESL teachers of the *pirivenas* utilized group activities or peer activities in the ESL classroom which fostered peer conversation in the ESL classroom.

3. Results and Discussions

It was understood that the research participants, who are mostly monolinguals, use their first language, Sinhala, as a resource to construct certain words/ concepts in English. It was also understood that the concept of translanguaging has always been utilized by the research participants in the ESL classroom, since it was a *sine qua non* to understand the foreign/ alien concepts that the learner is not familiar with. It is undeniable that translanguaging works as a bridge that connects restricting L1 and L2. However, it was understood that the research participants were using their L1 unnecessarily while restricting their usage of L2 merely to a negligible amount. It is important to understand the

gravity of this issue with reference to its history. Freire posits that “many political and educational plans have failed because their authors have designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their action) the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly designed”. (Freire.P, 1968). Translanguaging, as cited by Sung, K., & Spolsky, B., 2015 “ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoires as an integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011) was visible throughout the peer interactions. Before going into the nooks and corners of the discussions between the students, it’s necessary to delineate the significance of translanguaging. Sung, K., & Spolsky, B., 2015 cites Williams(2002) “ translanguaging entails using one language to reinforce the other in order to increase understanding. Thus, learners have to internalize new ideas they hear in one language, assign their own understanding to the message or concept, and simultaneously and immediately utilize the idea or concept in their other language” (Williams, 2002 cited in Lewis, et al. 2012). The mismatch between lesson material and the lived realities of the students deprived them from internalizing new ideas and assigning them with their own interpretations. Hence, utilizing familiar themes can revitalize the learner to interact more with the peers.

Table 1. Utterances and Translation

Utterance	Translation
halted kiyana eke meaning eka dannawada?	Do you know the meaning of the word halted?
Bus halt wageda?	Is it like a bus stop?
Halt kiyanne nawaththanawa neda?	Does halt mean stop?
Sir, anthima prashne homework da?	Is the last question for homework?
No	no
Mama Siripala amanushikai kiyala sentence eka English walata kohomada translate karanne?	How can I translate the sentence that Siripala is inhumane?
Ne ne	No
Api dennama peedithayo kiyala English walin liyamuda?	Shall we write that both of them are oppressed?
Nehe undennama innocent No.	Both of them are innocent

The research proves that “translanguaging is a naturally occurring phenomenon and translanguaging cannot be completely restrained by monolingual educational policies (Canagarajah,2011) However, it’s dubious whether to what extent the instructor is successful in recording real translanguaging in peer interactions to negotiate the meanings since “translanguaging occurs surreptitiously behind the backs of the teachers in classes that proscribe language mixing” (Canagarajah, 2011)

It was evident that, the students were more engaged in the first activity than the second one. In order to answer some of the questions in the first activity, major scaffolding was required by the students of both groups. The answers provided in the first activity through scaffolding were more productive than the answers provided in the individual activity. Canagarajah (2011) postulates that “ research on lingua franca communication indicates that multilinguals who do considerable preparatory work to negotiate the footing and terms of engagement with their interlocutors are more successful (Canagarajah,2011). Furthermore, Canagarajah hypothesizes that “the promotion of one form of language-standard English could alienate multilingual students and restrict their option for voice” (Canagarajah,2011) Since the learner-learner interactions to negotiate the meaning in the classroom are highly translingual, it provides the learner with ample space to voice his thoughts at ease.

4. Conclusion

The use of genuine negotiation of meaning through learner-learner interaction has many perks in pedagogic practices. Translingualism is a type of emancipation for the repressed multilingual speaker whose voice has been silenced by the monolingual-oriented dominant theories of the past (Sung, K., & Spolsky, B., 2015). It is undeniable that, these dominant theories were ubiquitous in monastic education. The experiences of the ESL classroom are suggestive that “translingualism accommodates communicative practices that include more expansive spatial repertoires that transcend text/context distinctions and transgress social boundaries.”(Canagarajah, 2017) A rote learning pedagogic practice won’t facilitate learner autonomy while serving interlanguage development. Also, it is noteworthy that “collective scaffolding through the process of translanguaging enables them to engage with the L2 at a deeper level than would be possible by using only one language”(Sung, K., & Spolsky, B., 2015).

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