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Strategic Use of L1 in L2 Class

Inayat Shah
Lecturer, UNIR, Faculty of English Studies, Sohar University, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract:
This theoretical paper was presented at the TESOL Arabia Conference 2014 in UAE. The paper theoretically discusses the issue of tertiary level ESL students using L1 and L2 with special reference to reading skills and the consequent ambivalence of the ESL instructors. The argument, whether to use only Target Language (TL) in skill based instruction or should there be a mixture of L1 in the L2 instruction, has been the subject of immense importance for the teachers and researchers of Second Language Teaching (SLT). The teachers in the English as Foreign/ Second Language (ES/FL) institutions are usually instructed not to use students' L1 (Arabic) inside the classrooms while students insist they do not understand the target concepts clearly without the help of a teacher who would speak their L1. The author has highlighted and exemplified the current theories concerning the use of L1 in L2 classes and proposes the Strategic Instruction in the light of those theories. The author also proposes that a systematic, strategic, conscious and judicious use of L1 in L2 Reading comprehension instruction enhances learners' understanding of the target skill.

1. Rationale (Personal Experience)

The paper discusses the issue of tertiary level ESL students using L1 and L2 with special reference to reading skills and the consequent ambivalence of the ESL instructors. The idea of choosing this topic came to the researcher because of his personal experience of teaching ESL/EFL at the tertiary level institutions in non English speaking countries. The teachers in the EFL institutions were asked not to use students' L1 (Arabic) inside the classrooms while students insisted they did not understand the target concepts clearly without the help of a teacher who would speak their L1. The teachers, on the other hand, were always divided in their opinions regarding the use of L1 in L2 classes: those who preferred to use students' L1 during instructions and those who would refrain from using even a bilingual dictionary.

2. Research Question

The primary aim of this paper is to determine to what extent use of L1 in L2 class is permissible or is it possible to determine a certain strategy of using L1 into L2 classes especially with reference to reading skills? In the present study, the presenter has tried to determine the extent of the use of L1 in reading comprehension in L2 classes and asked for further research to determine how reading instruction can be facilitated by the use of L1 in classrooms.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Carless, 2008; Tsai, et al., 2010; Shih, 1992) shows that the use of learners' L1 in L2 reading comprehension instruction has always been fruitful to learners, yet the plethora of literature available in favor of only L2 use suggests a parallel view that contradicts theory with practice in both cases. The argument, whether to use only Target Language (TL) in skill based instruction or should there be an admixture of L1 in the instruction, has been the subject of immense importance for the teachers and researchers of SLT. The important thing to mention here would be to look at the different theories that suggest one or the other school of thought. Although there have always been two opposite opinions regarding the use of L1 in L2 pedagogy, "policy and practice operate as though the monolingual principle had been established as common sense" (Cook, 2001, as cited in Cummins, 2007, p. 224). In this context, Cummins (2007) points out that most teaching guides propound the idea of complete avoidance of L1 in L2 teaching. Though very elaborately written "no classroom use of the L1 is ever mentioned" (224) in them. Cummins regrets that even in the field of ESL instruction "there has been virtually no policy-oriented discussion of the "two solitudes" assumption… (224). Citing Turnbull (2001), Cumming (2007) points out that "under some circumstances (e.g. explanation of a difficult grammatical concept) use of the L1 may be efficient but he emphasizes that "it is crucial for teachers to use the Target Language (TL) as much as possible in contexts in which students spend only short periods of time in class on a daily basis, and when they have little contact with the TL outside the classroom" (224). In the similar context, elaborating the history of SLA research Cook (2001) highlights the fact that the "part and parcel of this tradition" of using only L2 in instruction "comes from the strongly preached conviction to "ban the LI from the classroom" (404). Citing Macaro (1997), and Duff, et al., (1990), Cook (2001) argues that even the researchers who are not much enthusiastic about avoiding the L1 take the issue primarily with the extent to which this is imposed and these researchers "wind up their discussion of the high variability of L2 use in the classroom by listing suggestions for enhancing the proportion of the L2 component, not for utilizing the LI component" (405).

Many Researchers are of the opinion that the established notion of the monolingual principle is derived from a certain ideological perspective that endorses the efficacy of the class system as society. Cumming (2007) finds the following monolingual ideological assumptions problematic in skill based EFL in the global contexts:

"• English is best taught monolingually.
 • The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
 • The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
 • The more English is taught, the better the results.
 • Standards of English will decline if other languages are used for any significant amount of instructional time." (225).

Researchers (Cohen, 1995; Cook. 2001; 2003; 2004; Sharma, 2006; Cummins, 2007) argue that although the monolingual pedagogy is exclusively seen as a natural commonsense practice in ESL context, very little evidence is available to testify the notion. The present day researchers (Cook. 2001; 2003; 2004; Sharma, 2006; Cummins, 2007) provide evidence showing that L1 and/or bilingual alternatives are not only useful but essential for adult ESL learners with inadequate L1 literacy or schooling and that the use of students' linguistic resources can be beneficial at all levels of ESL. These days, the taboo against using L1 in classrooms is breaking down, and the attitude to L1 and translation in language classes has observed a positive change following the recognition that some learners use the L1 as a communicative strategy to learn and use the FL (Odlin 1989, and Cook 2001). In fact, with the passage of time a relatively new teaching method which deliberately uses L1 in teaching EFL has emerged in ESL/EFL pedagogy.

The researcher practitioners (Dreyer, 2003; Cook, 2004; Yang, 2006; Cummins, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Tsai, et al.; 2010) believe that although reading in the L1 shares numerous elements with reading in L2/FL, their methods of instruction differ greatly. The issues of text, level, competence, and use of strategies differ immensely. Whether the use of L1 is permissible in L2 reading instruction or not, there are two parallel modes of instruction available in research that of accommodating the use of L1 in L2 and that of complete avoidance of L1. Considerable subsequent research has documented convincingly the enhancement of metalinguistic awareness that bilingual students experience as a result of processing two languages (Cummins, 2001, as cited in Cumming, 2007, p. 229). Skill based reading strategies incorporate metalinguistic awareness among the students. Metalinguistic awareness refers to the understanding that language is a system of communication, bound to rules, and forms the basis for the ability to discuss different ways to use language. In other words, with metalinguistic ability the students are able to consciously analyze language and its subparts, to know how they operate and how they are incorporated into the wider language system, e.g., while reading, a student may consciously apply the strategies of reading comprehension that were taught him in his/her L1. An individual with such ability is aware that linguistic forms and structure can interact and be manipulated to produce a vast variety of meanings. Hitherto the monolingual ideology with its "rigid and complete separation of languages" had made cross-language instructional focus impossible" (Cumming, 2007, p. 229) and had prevented learners from utilizing their cognitive resources but the modern skill based pedagogy through use of L1 employs metalinguistic awareness in instruction that makes the students in bilingual programs spontaneously concentrate on similarities and differences in their L1 and TL and compare and contrast two or three languages. Simultaneously the learners benefit from strategic employment of those skills by the teacher in the classroom and develop their language awareness.

Theoretically, cognitive psychology does not support the monolingual perspective in the ESL context. Cognitive psychology emphasizes on the learners' prior knowledge as a medium for further understanding. Cummins (2007) argues that "if students' prior knowledge is encoded in their L1, then their L1 is clearly relevant to their learning even when instruction is through the medium of L2" (231). Cross-lingual transfer is another process that develops bilingual knowledge. In fact, both cross lingual transfer and bilingual development are mutually interdependent. Cummins (1981 as cited in Cummins, 2007) suggests that instead of being a haphazard process, it helps to teach two-way cross-lingual transfer (L1 to L2, L2 to L1). A further step to deter the monoliguists from their rigid adherence to L1 only notion is Cook's (2007) introduction of "multi-competence" (as cited in Cummins, 2007, p. 231) referred as multilingualism. Coupled with the notion of prior knowledge multilingualism suggests the process of cognition as different from that of the monolinguals.

"The role of prior knowledge is particularly relevant to the issue of teaching for cross-linguistic transfer because if prior knowledge is encoded in students' L1, then the engagement of prior knowledge is inevitably mediated through L1. The new understandings are constructed on a foundation of existing understandings and experiences. Prior knowledge, skills, beliefs and concepts significantly influence what learners notice about their environment and how they organize and interpret their observations. Prior knowledge refers not just to information or skills previously acquired in a transmission-oriented instructional sequence but to the totality of the experiences that have shaped the learner's identity and cognitive functioning. This principle implies that when students are being educated through a second language instruction teachers should explicitly attempt to activate students' prior knowledge and build relevant background knowledge as necessary" (Cummins, 2007, p.232).

The idea of prior knowledge is justified when it comes to the use of L1 in L2 classrooms while teaching reading skills. Reading, whether in L1 or L2 is surely an important skill. For Palincsar and Brown (1984) reading is essentially a linguistic activity that solves SL learners' problems, hence they propose Strategic Reading activities in the instruction. They recommend the need of recognition, on the part of the instructor, of the relationship between L1 and L2 and the consequent degree of success in the outcome of L1 utilization of reading strategies in L2 classrooms. Since reading strategies are regarded ways of overcoming difficulties encountered while reading, reading in an L2 is not a monolingual event, rather it is a bilingual or multilingual process. L2 readers have access to their first language as they read. The influence of the L1 on L2 and vice versa on the learner's

performance in a given target language is called "bidirectional transfer" (Pavlenko, et al.; 2002, p.191). Bidirectional transfer has an effect on all linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomena such as phonetic, phonological, semantic, syntactic, morphological levels and cultural and attitudinal concepts. Bilinguals frequently shift between the languages and code-switch. Bidirectional transfer is the two-way interaction between the two linguistic systems; hence the strategic instruction facilitates Bidirectional Transfer. A further approach into the notion of strategic use of L1 in L2 skills teaching is propounded by Kecskes, et al.; (2005) who calling it "Dual Language System" (49), suggest the hypothesis that the selection and incorporation of lexical items and structures in L1 and vice versa reveal the level of conceptual fluency in the target language. Kecskes, et al., (2000, 2003 as cited in Kecskes, et al., 2005) emphasize that an intensive use of a foreign language can generate Dual Language System especially in an environment where the target culture is not present. The hypothesis suggests that "the main issue in foreign and second language acquisition is how the emerging new language with its own socio-cultural foundation will affect the existing L1-governed knowledge and conceptual base of the language learner, and how this effect is reflected in the use of both languages" (Kecskes et al, 2005, p.49). Research in language studies and the use of L1 in L2 instruction (Selinker, 1972) has also used terms such as L1 and interlanguage. Interlanguage is the language of the L2 learner as an approximation to an L1 system of native speakers. However, Cook (2003) introduces a comprehensive concept of 'multicompetence' in addition to language transfer, interlanguage and bidirectional transfer. Multi-competence is referred to as the knowledge of two or more languages in one mind. It involves the concept of interlanguage and L1, and regards the mind of the L2 user with these components as a whole. Cook (2004) suggests that since the L1 and L2 are in the same mind, they must constitute a whole unique language super-system at some level of cognition. Therefore, teaching and studying second language must take cognizance of and accept this process in its totality, not just the interlanguage component. Grosjean (1992, as cited in Pavlenko, et al.; 2002) also states that a bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals in one body but rather a particular speaker with a unique linguistic system. The idea of multi-competence is not just confined to influence of L1 on L2, it opens a new area of research on the effects of L2 on L1 as well. Language transfer is not restricted to L1 transfer only, the direction of this transfer may also be the reverse. This kind of transfer is referred to as "reverse or backward transfer" (Kecskes et at, 2000, 2003 as cited in Kecskes et at 2005, p. 50). With all that has been mentioned above about the benefits of knowing a second language and the cross-linguistic influence, it seems that not much research has been carried out on the effects of L2 on L1 as far as the transfer of reading strategies from L2 to L1 is concerned.

Studies in L1 and L2 showed that reading strategy instruction can help poor readers improve their reading comprehension. A systematic, strategic, conscious and judicious use of L1 in L2 Reading comprehension instruction enhances learners' understanding of the target skill. Palincsar et al., (1984) argue that with the help of reading strategies, comprehension of SL texts is enhanced as long as they are well written and based on the learner's prior knowledge, and they follow a familiar structure and their syntax, style, clarity of presentation and coherence reach an acceptable level. It is with the reader's prior knowledge (in L1) of the content of the text that comprehension is influenced. Jiang, et al., (2007) suggest that discourse comprehension skills contribute to reading abilities. More specifically, awareness of how certain texts are organized is seen as an important part of a reader's overall comprehension abilities. One of the major ways in which students can be trained to recognize discourse structuring in texts is through the use of Graphic Organizers (GOs) as an instructional tool. For Jian (2007) GOs, whether in L1 texts or L2 texts, are visual representation of information in the text. The recommendations to use GOs as part of reading instruction are commonly found in the first language (L1) reading literature and extensively incorporated … in second language (L2) contexts" (34). GOs are considered to be important instructional tools because "a good graphic representation can show at a glance the key parts of a whole and their relations, thereby allowing a holistic understanding that words alone cannot convey" (Jones, et al., 1988,1989 as cited in Jiang, 2007, p. 34) - hence adding to L2 learner's understanding. Proposing reading strategy use, He (2008) argues that skilled reading is characterized by an ability to utilize strategies such as monitoring, inferring or activating schemata in the classroom."Skilled readers in their L1 cautiously and constantly monitor their comprehension in L2, and know how to make bridging inferences across various segments of texts. They also modify or elaborate inferences based on prior knowledge or on new clues gathered from the text" (224). Besides, skilled readers use logic or background knowledge to overcome reading difficulties. "Use of these strategies leads to a better understanding of the contents of written texts" (McNamara, 2004 as cited in He, 2008 p. 224). Zhang's (2008) constructivist study explores how an ESL/EFL learner's willingness or receptiveness to strategic reading instruction could add up to learner development and the possible effects of such instruction on reading comprehension skill. The reciprocal teaching activities support learner development. Although different cultures have their own L1 literacy practices, motivated learners are able to have room for change under the supervision of the teacher through dialogic interaction in classroom contexts. The findings in Zhang's (2008) study provide evidence "that lends further support to pedagogical initiatives that have incorporated strategy instruction in second/foreign-language contexts" (113). The positive outcomes of teacher intervention through strategic instruction would make teachers acknowledge and adapt what the learners bring to the classroom as prior knowledge. Sterzik, et al., (2012) also argue that in academic contexts, "reading is the basis for much of the knowledge that both first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) students require to succeed" (104). Through strategic instruction, the learners are required to read, analyze, synthesize, evaluate and interpret the texts. They try to infer the writer's intention through their own knowledge of the text. The process of interpretation of the texts and reading between the lines is termed as 'text-based representation of meaning'. "Armed with a solid text-based level of comprehension, readers are then prepared to interact with and integrate the newly acquired knowledge into their own knowledge base to achieve a more interpretative, situation-based representation of meaning" (Kintsch, 1998 as cited in Sterzik, et al., 2012. P. 104). At this level, both the textual information and the prior knowledge of the learners generate an altered knowledge better understood by the readers.

The studies (Seng, et al.; 2000; Jiang, et al.; 2007; Macaro, et al.; 2008; Zhang, 2008; Al-Nofaie, 2010) have also shown that an increase in L2 reading ability, and reading strategy awareness and use will result in an increase in L1 reading ability, and reading strategy awareness. When the bilingual ESL/EFL learners are exposed to think-aloud procedures, transferred strategic behaviors

from one language to the other emerge regardless of their proficiency level. The researchers (Palincsar et al.,1984; Yang, 2006; Cummins, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Tsai, et al.; 2010) have also used and compared strategy use among ESL learners in their L1 and L2 and found that readers use identical comprehension strategies in their two languages, suggesting that reading strategies may transfer across languages, regardless of linguistic distance. The bilingual readers tend to have a unitary view of reading and conceive many similarities between reading in L1 and L2. In other words, L1 reading strategies transfer to the L2 context. As mentioned earlier the direction of the transfer may be from L1 to L2 or from L2 to L1, called 'reverse transfer' (Cook, 2003, p.1). In other words, the L2 user's knowledge of their first language is undoubtedly influenced by the other languages they learn, in terms of syntax, lexicon, pragmatics, phonology, etc. The fact that although the surface features like pronunciation and fluency of different languages are distinct; there is a fundamental cognitive/academic proficiency level that is universal across languages. This common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related proficiency from one language to another.

From above discussion it is obvious that in the debate of monolingual and bilingual strategic instruction, bilingual strategic instruction gets prominence. The following are few of the bilingual instructional activities documented by Lucas and Katz (1994 as cited in Cummins, 2007, p. 226) that do not necessitate teachers to know the L1 languages of their students:

"• At one site the teacher devised a group writing assignment in which students used their L1. At another site, students read or told stories to each other using their L1 and then translated them into English to tell to other students.
• Students from the same language backgrounds were paired together so that students who were more fluent in English could help those less fluent.
• Students were encouraged to use bilingual dictionaries as a resource to understand difficult text.
• Students were encouraged to discuss school work and get help at home in their native languages from family members.
• Books in students' L1 were provided and students were encouraged to read them. Research consistently supports the efficacy of bilingual dictionary use for vocabulary learning as compared to monolingual dictionary use or simply learning from context alone."
(Cumming, 2007, p.226).

4. Analysis
Learning strategy-based instruction is a learner-focused approach to teaching with the goal of creating greater learner self-sufficiency and increased proficiency. It helps students to become more responsive to available strategies, to understand how to categorize and use strategies systematically and effectively, and to learn when and how to transfer strategies to new contexts. If we want to learn more about this hypothetical conceptual threshold, we need to argue what happens when foreign or second language learners start to learn new words in the TL. It may be suggested that they will relate a word in the FL to its translation equivalent in the L1, and will do so by constructing a lexical link between these two words. Encountering a new word in the foreign language, the learner tries to reach into the conceptual base to find the concept that the word in the target language stands for. Since the conceptual system of the learner is L1-based, the closest concept can be reached through a word that denotes the concept in the L1.   Consequently, there can hardly be any direct course between the FL word and the concept at this stage of development. The obvious way for the FL learner to reach the concept is through the L1 translation equivalent. Pedagogically, it is implied that since languages are in interaction and have effects on each other, we can reach multiple goals by learning another language i.e., to broaden the horizon of our knowledge by learning L2, and to compensate for areas of weaknesses in L1 as a result of the transfer of knowledge from L2 to L1. With a strategic use of L1 into L2 instruction, our students would be cognitively and conceptually developed both in L2, in which they receive the instruction, and L1, to which transfer of knowledge and concepts are extracted. It is the job of L2 teachers to make sure if their learners are aware of their own range and capabilities of learning strategies in L1 and L2 and incorporating those strategies in their cognition process.

5. Implications and Conclusion
For reasons enumerated above, it seems justifiable to construct separate spaces for each language, L1 and L2 within a bilingual program and incorporate strategic method in skill based instruction. There are also cogent arguments to be made for creating a shared or interdependent space for the promotion of language awareness and cross-language cognitive processing. It is a fact that the learners always make cross-language connections throughout the process of second/ foreign language acquisition so it is worthwhile to cultivate an understanding of the proper use of strategic instructions that may incorporate both L1 and L2 in the instructions and enhance learners' language skills. Use of monolingual strategy-based instruction then seems to fall short of the goals of foreign or second language teaching and thus should be avoided. Yet there is need for further research on the issue as well as some agreement between the researchers on both the sides.

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