

Translanguaging in Higher Education

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Abstract

Teachers' pedagogical practices have vital role to cater the students' achievement in education in general and in language (here English) education in particular. This study aims to explore English language teachers' pedagogical practices with special reference to translanguaging. I employed qualitative research design for the study. The participants of the study were four community college teachers and six students of Dhading district. For the collection of the data, I observed four classes of each teacher; interviewed with the same teachers; and organized focus group discussion with the students. The findings were discussed under eight headings thematically. The conclusion of findings indicates that translanguaging can be a useful pedagogy even in the higher education. Hence, it has been recommended that the English language practitioners can conduct large scale studies on the relevance of translanguaging in higher education.

Keywords: Translanguaging, bilingualism, multilingualism, first language

Introduction

I did not know the notion of 'Translanguaging' even when I was a student of Master's Degree. However, I remember that I and my classmates wanted our teachers to teach English using our first language, i.e. Nepali. Moreover, when I became a teacher of English I found that my students also expected me to teach English and content using both English and Nepali, their mother tongue, simultaneously. This is true at present as well. Later on, I knew that what we as students expected from our English language teacher at the time of past, and what my students expect from me as teacher at present was nothing but it was, in fact, translanguaging. Hence, translanguaging is, "The process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages" (Baker, 2011, p.288). For Blackledge and Creese (2010), translanguaging is interactional, transformative, negotiated, contextualized and situated with ideological elements, all of which are performed within the classroom. I am curious and motivated to explore the pedagogical practices and activities used in B. Ed. that support to the theory of translanguaging, in Nepalese context.

In this study, I have focused on students' translinguaging' practices and their collaborative construction of learning by bringing their available linguistic resources into classroom. I want to study the creation of a positive ecological framework that would position Nepali (students' home language) and English (their target language) languages in an equal continuum of relations and present the benefits of translinguaging for learning, and the co-construction of meaning-making.

In the present world, people can be hardly monolingual and we can hardly imagine a monolingual society. There is a continuous fluctuation of languages across the world. It has resulted into the greater hybridization in all aspects and fields related to human life that the situation has been more than diverse what Piller (2016) terms as "superdiversity". Schools or educational institutions being the miniatures of society, the bilingual or multilingual nature of a community is reflected in a school or even in a classroom. Therefore, we can hardly imagine monolingual classrooms in the present day world.

Many approaches, methods and techniques have been emerged and disappeared. The main cause of disappearance of newly emerged approaches, methods or techniques is the failure of one-size-fits-to-all slogan. Ellis (1984) states that traditionally, researchers and linguists only had more discussions on the role of the factors like: group dynamics, individual learning strategies and techniques, learning styles, anxiety, age, motivation and aptitudes. Therefore, the traditional teaching theories, methods and practices were not much comprehensive to address the needs of multilingual classrooms.

Following Hornberger (1989, as cited in Stavrou (2015), regarding the L1-L2 transfer continuum, "First language(L1) and second language(L2) continuity also affects biliteracy development in one language is connected with the progress in the other language" (p. 39). In line with Hornberger (1989), Dworin (2003) views biliteracy development as;

a bidirectional process and not just as a linear course which involves transfer from the first language to the second and vice versa. Particularly, it is argued that biliteracy development is a dynamic, flexible process since children may use two forms of written literacies mediating their language learning for both languages."(as cited in Stavrou, 2015, pp. 39-40).

Studies show that children would simultaneously learn two languages even if they had different script and discourse mode (Garcia, , Skutnabb-Kangas, &

Torres-Guzman, 2006). Bilingual students use their complex discursive practices to acquire knowledge and therefore, enhance their learning by drawing on their entire available linguistic repertoire. Hornberger and Link (2012) argued that utilizing literacy practices that accept the constructive use of students' home language can serve the acquisition of literacy in other languages alongside English. Therefore, it could be argued that the development of meanings in English can be supported through the constructive use of first language of the learners.

The use of more than one language has not only affected the linguistic aspects of human life; but it also has impacts on social, cultural and cognitive aspects. Various researches and discussions in language teaching and learning (such as, Cook, 1992; Cummins, 2001; Li Wei, 2011; Garcia, 2016; Canagarajah, 2017) have suggested that multilinguals have better access to vocabulary, multiple abilities in their use and the way of making interpretations, and more logical ways of looking at things.

Review of Related Literature

Some of the recently carried out research in the field of translanguaging include Kano (2012) who has explored students' use of translanguaging, which involves use of students' home language(s) through code-switching, translation, and/or a combination of both, in the process of learning to write in English. In the study Kano has recommended use of bilingual texts, and translanguaging for teaching language through concepts, for explicit instruction and comprehensible input and for discussion. Similarly, Sayer (2012) carried out an ethnography study of how bilingual teachers and students use their home language, TexMex, to mediate content and standard languages. The information obtained from the data suggested that the participants did not only use Spanish and English but also they used the standard and vernacular varieties, a movement called translanguaging. Furthermore, the study showed that translanguaging through TexMex enabled the teacher and students to create discursive spaces that allowed them to engage them with the social meanings in school from their position as bilingual nations. Their study also proved translanguaging as a legitimized means of performing desired identities. In the same vein, Nambisan (2014) carried out a study on 'Teachers' attitudes towards and uses of translanguaging in English language classrooms in Iowa. The study aimed to examine the existing attitudes and practices of translanguaging, the use of the students' native language. Findings indicated that the majority of the participants supported the use of translanguaging as a useful pedagogical tool. Furthermore, Konomi (2015) observed the use of mother tongue in EFL classrooms with young English learners

in Korca, Albania. The article aimed to explore to what extent English teachers speak the Mother Tongue (Albania) in EFL classrooms when they taught young English learners in public school in Korca, Albania. The data obtained from the classrooms observations and interviews showed that all the observed teachers in the EFL classrooms used the Mother Tongue. The conclusion of the study was that the teacher should know when to use and when not to use Mother Tongue. In the same strength, Herrera (2017) carried out a doctoral research on “translanguaging practices for educational equity” which was conducted in the South Bronx Academy of New York city. The major findings of the study were; through translanguaging, students were able to position themselves as knowers, taking up translanguaging enabled them to do and have a voice expand their repertoires and messages, and clarity and amplify their understanding of the content. Moreover, engaging with translanguaging practices was about giving students more access to the content, substantially increasing the access to more educational equity for language-minoritized students.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study were as follows:

- a) To explore the pedagogical practices in ELT classroom.
- b) To explore the perceptions of both teachers’ and students’ towards translanguaging.

Significance of the Study

Nearly all the classrooms, presently, are linguistically heterogenous. This study mainly deals with translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in ELT in higher level (here, B.Ed). I do claim that this study is useful to several stakeholders who are involved in the field of language teaching, especially, in bi/multilingual settings. I hope this will be beneficial to the teachers and the students of the related field. Apart from the teachers and students, it will be also useful to language policy makers, materials developers, ELT practitioners and curriculum developers.

Method

In order to carry out this study, I employed qualitative research design. The area of the study included four campuses, namely Tripurasundari Multiple Campus, Jageshwar Multiple campus, Bhimodaya campus and Bindebasini campus(all are pseudonyms) of Dhading district. Four teachers (one from each campus) and six

students (from only one campus) were the participants. For the collection of data, each teacher's class was observed; interviewed with the same teachers; and organized focus group discussion with the students. The research tools were classroom observation, interview with teacher and focus group discussion with the students. All the questions that were asked in the interviews were unstructured. All the participants were purposively selected.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the data have been discussed and interpreted under the following headings:

Reduction of fear and anxieties through the use of L1. In response to my query about the purpose of using students' first language in teaching and learning the second language, all the teachers and students of this study stated that the use of students' first language (here Nepali) helped to reduce the fear and anxieties of the learners created due to the excessive dominance of the second language (here English). At the same time the respondents also told me that the use of first language in teaching and learning the second or foreign language helped to make the learners active and curious.

Reducing linguistic genocide. One of my informants told me that the use of first language does not only facilitate to learn the foreign language but also helps to reduce the linguistic genocide that is happening presently in the world if we use two or more than two languages simultaneously in the bi/multilingual classroom. He further told me that every languages are of equal importance. We can also relate his idea with the idea of Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) that the deprivation of linguistic minorities to develop and use their language for access to education and information considered as linguistic genocide crime against humanity. Similarly, in regards of entertaining bi/multilingual classroom, Garcia (2009) states that we must move away from monoglossic concepts of language models of education and aim to pursue dynamic models of bilingual education in the 21st century.

A Resource in ESL/ EFL classroom. In my query to my informants whether the students' first language was a problem or are source inside a bi/multilingual classroom, they responded that it was not a problem but a resource. Further they told me that the use of first language inside the bi/ multilingual classroom helps to both teacher and students in teaching and learning the second or foreign language. Even the students in focus group discussion agreed the need of their home language in learning second language.

Simultaneous use of first and second languages. The participants of the study suggested to all the English teachers of Bachelor level that they should use students' first language simultaneously, but not separating them.

Translanguaging and writing skill. The information obtained from classroom observation revealed that translanguaging pedagogy or the first language helped writing skill. Again, I put a query to both teachers about the role of first language, they told me that the first language helped to develop students' writing skill. This can be related with the experience of Sasaki (2001, p. 111);

I have written several papers in English, some of which are published in professional journals.... Although in the end those papers are written in English, all the other matters related to writing process are conducted in my first language..., Japanese....Through the entire research process, I think in Japanese, take notes in Japanese, and write the first rough drafts in Japanese because I can't think thoroughly about any complicated matters in English....This may not be the most efficient way of writing an English paper ..., but this is the only way I can write in English.

Subconscious use of translanguaging pedagogy. In one classroom observation of a teacher, I saw that he was using the two languages, English and Nepali, parallelly while he was teaching grammar. He started his teaching from Nepali and connected it with English. Furthermore, he also enlisted the examples both in English and Nepali simultaneously. Later in the interview, when I asked him and the other teacher if they had any ideas about translanguaging pedagogy, they told me that they did not know about it. This revealed that the teachers were using translanguaging pedagogy partially but subconsciously.

Translation as the dominant strategy. Translation is the oldest and the traditional way of teaching second or foreign language using the first language. Grammar Translation method dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s, and in the modified form it continues to widely used in some parts of the world today. Contemporary texts for the teaching of foreign languages at the college level often reflect Grammar Translation principles. These texts are frequently the products of people trained in literature rather than in language teaching or applied linguistics (Richards and Rodgers ,2001 p. 5-6). In most cases of classroom observation, I saw the teachers were teaching using translation method. I also asked them if they used any other pedagogical practices to use first language apart from translation, they replied negatively.

Makes classroom teaching more participatory. Learners' active participation plays an important role for the successful teaching and learning. In this respect I asked my informants why it was necessary to use learners' first language. In replying to this query, they stated that the use of learners' first language promoted learners' participation in learning process. Further, they opined that the use of learners' first language also geared the learners' autonomy. In the same vein, Brantmeier (online) points out that co-learning challenges the traditional authoritative, dominant and subordinate role sets in schooling environments and the unequal power relationships in wider spheres of our world. It empowers the learner, and "builds a more genuine community of practice." It moves the teacher and the learner toward a more "dynamic and participatory engagement" in knowledge construction.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the teachers were unknown about translanguaging pedagogies whereas they accepted the utility of the first language in teaching and learning English language. Hence, what I would like to conclude that if the teachers have the proper theoretical as well as practical knowledge about translanguaging pedagogy, they can implement it properly and the students can learn English in a better and easier way in one hand and on the other hand, it also helps to preserve the learners' home language. This implies to the concerned policy makers and English language practitioners to conduct large scale of researches on this issue in one hand and on the other hand, to conduct trainings for the teachers who are teaching at B. Ed.

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