

Teachers' Ideologies on Linguistic Diversity as a Resource

Uma N. Sharma



Department of English Education,
University Campus

Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Department of English Education
Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal
Tribhuvan University

unsharma24@gmail.com

Article Received: 12 June 2024

Revised version received: 14 December 2024

Accepted: 27 December 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/selta.v2i2.74082>

Abstract

Nepal is very fertile in its linguistic diversity. A significant body of literature has recommended the use of linguistic diversity as a resource for teaching/learning of a second or foreign language. This article aims at finding out the English language teachers' ideologies regarding linguistic diversity as a resource in English language teaching in a multilingual classroom in context of Nepal. For this, the data were collected from 8 secondary level teachers of English in Kathmandu district using questionnaire and interview techniques. The responses were analyzed and interpreted descriptively as well as intuitively. The analysis shows that the teachers' remarks are paradoxical in that they were not aware of importance of using the students' home language(s) to further learning of English though when they were made aware of some ways in which students' home languages can be used as vehicles for successful English language acquisition, they not only could not deny it but also were highly convinced that students' home languages in a multilingual classroom constitute valuable resources. It is recommended that the English language teacher training/education programmes/courses should be designed in such a way that the teacher trainees would be able to use linguistic diversity as a resource in multilingual language teaching classrooms.

Keywords: Multilingualism, language ideology, language policy, English language teaching

Introduction

Nepal is a multiethnic, multireligious, multicultural and multilingual federal republican country. Linguistically speaking, Nepal is one of the richest countries in the world. In other words, Nepal is very fertile in its linguistic diversity. Moreover, due to the developing knowledge of linguistics on the part of the authority and developing linguistic awareness on the part of the language users with the changing political system and language policy of the nation, the indigenous so-called minority languages are flourishing leading to multilingual turn. According to the census report of 2011, there are 123 languages spoken as mother tongue. Besides 123 languages, there are other two categories namely, 'Others' and 'Not reported'.

The diverse linguistic situation in the country has been found even within smaller local communities in most of the cases. The societal multilingual situation is reflected in the educational institutions, such as schools and colleges in the communities resulting into multilingual classrooms. A significant body of literature has recommended the use of such a linguistic diversity as a resource for teaching/learning of a second or foreign language. For example, Phyak (2016) has maintained that the multilingual learners' fluid, dynamic, and heterogeneous multilingual practices, such as translanguaging and translation should be recognized as legitimate knowledge in education. The multilingual turn argues for embracing children's multilingual practices, identities, and voices as resources (Ruiz, 1984) for effective language learning and multilingual learners' academic achievement. Cummins (2006) argues that multilingual pedagogies are necessary to empower and affirm students' multilingual and multicultural identities in learning processes. Cummins (2006) further argues that recognizing students' multilingual identities contributes to students' greater cognitive investment and transformative skills and knowledge in language pedagogies. However, ideologies regarding language pedagogies are deeply influenced by monolingual perspective in practice.

Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity (also referred to as language diversity) may be a societal, institutional or classroom situation in which the society, institution or classroom consists of linguistically diverse people or students. The term in this study has been used to refer to the situation of classroom with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The classroom with linguistically diverse students is also termed as 'Bilingual [or multilingual] classroom' (Creese & Blackledge, 2010: 103; Jessner, 2008:

99). “Bilingual [or multilingual] contexts are hugely varied, with multiple models and structures existing indifferent education systems across the world” (Creese & Blackledge, 2010: 103). For example, bilingual or multilingual classrooms in Nepal are usually Nepali (dominant) bilingual ones. Another point is that most of the speakers of other than Nepali in Nepal speak more or less Nepali as well. In such a case, using Nepali in English language teaching classroom also is using students’ home language or linguistic diversity as a resource.

Language Ideology

Language ideology refers to the set of ideas or beliefs about language or languages and their usefulness or role perceived by an individual or a group of people belonging to a particular culture or society. Silverstein (1979: 193) defines language ideology as a “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use”. For Silverstein, thus, language ideology embraces human consciousness and subjectivity in the interpretation of language and language practices. While Heath (1989: 53) takes language ideologies as “self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language”, Irvine (1989: 255) considers them “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests”.

Kroskrity (2009: 72-73) argues that language ideologies “represent the perception of language and *discourse* that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group”. This argument shows how language policies are affected by dominant sociopolitical and economic discourses at local, national, and global levels.

In the present study, teachers’ ideology of language means the constellation of their consciousness, values, attitudes, discourses, and epistemologies about language, and language policies and practices. The ideologies of language the teachers visualize influence the pedagogical practices they employ in the language teaching classroom, if other things remain constant.

Language Policy

Language policy refers to the national language planning, including the determination of what language(s) is/are to be used officially and used/learned in school, which also affects language choices at home and in other community sites. In the very beginning, the language policy makers have some language ideologies that guide them to make certain decisions at policy level. And later on, the existing language

policies affect the construction of language ideologies. Thus, there is two-way cyclical influence of each other between language ideology and language policy.

Using Linguistic Diversity as a Resource

‘Multilingual pedagogy’ (Cummins, 2006), ‘translanguaging’ (Garcia & Sylvan, 2001; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011b), ‘codemeshing’ (Canagarajah, 2011a), ‘multilingual resource engineering’ (Bateman, Kruijff-Korvayova, & Kruijff, 2005), bilingual education, multilingual education, ‘bilingual instructional strategy or bilingual approach to language teaching’ (Blackledge & Creese, 2010), ‘multicompetence approach’ (Jessner, 2008; Cook, 1991) ‘translanguaging ideologies and pedagogies’ (García & Li, 2014; Phyak, 2016a) ‘multiliteracies’ (Street, 2003), ‘plurilingual-proficiency’ (Garcia & Sylvan, 2001), and ‘multilingual identity’ (Block, 2007) of multilingual learners are some of the terms and concepts that reflect the classroom practices in line with the concept of using linguistic diversity as a resource for language teaching in a multilingual classroom.

Among these terms and concepts, multilingual pedagogy is a cover term that encompasses the total discourse of multilingual classroom pedagogy including translanguaging, translation, multicompetence approach and many others conformed to the multilingual turn. However, translanguaging is the notion that has received increasing attention in context of multilingual education. Translanguaging is a construct that refers to the complex use of more than one language as a (combined) resource in classroom or even outside in bilingual and multilingual societies. Canagarajah (2011b: 1) regards translanguaging as a neologism that stands for the assumptions:

... that, for multilinguals, languages are part of a repertoire that is accessed for their communicative purposes; languages are not discrete and separated, but form an integrated system for them; multilingual competence emerges out of local practices where multiple languages are negotiated for communication; competence doesn't consist of separate competencies for each language, but a multicompetence that functions symbiotically for the different languages in one's repertoire; and, for these reasons, proficiency for multilinguals is focused on repertoire building – i.e., developing abilities in the different functions served by different languages – rather than total mastery of each and every language.

At the same time, the term ‘translanguaging’ is central to (or used to refer to) many other terms, such as codemeshing, transcultural literacy; translingual writing, multiliteracies, continua of biliteracy, pluriliteracy, plurilingualism, third spaces,

metrolingualism, fluid lects, hetero-graphy, and poly-lingual languaging (see Canagarajah 2011b).

Therefore, everything I want to explore, centers around translanguaging, the simultaneous use of diverse languages that multilingual learners bring into classroom for learning the target language (here, English). To put it in plain language, I am interested in what theory they believe in regarding the use of diverse languages as a resource to further learning of English, and why they believe so.

Objective

In the above context, I am interested in English language teachers' ideologies regarding linguistic diversity as a resource in their classroom. I want to explore what they think or believe about the use of linguistic diversity as a resource in their classroom. In short, the study aims at finding out the English language teachers' ideologies regarding linguistic diversity as a resource in English language teaching in a multilingual classroom in context of Nepal. It is because all what the teachers believe on regarding the use of linguistic diversity in multilingual English language teaching classroom depends on the language ideologies and policies they agree with.

Methods

This study has been carried out employing “explanatory sequential” (Doile, Brady, & Byrne, 2016) mixed-method design in which quantitative findings are explained qualitatively. The study is mainly based on primary data. The study group consists secondary level English teachers in Kathmandu district. The relevant data were collected from 8 teachers teaching English in Grade 9 and 10, using structured questionnaire and open-ended interview techniques. For the collection of the relevant data, the researcher prepared a questionnaire to elicit the teachers' ideologies regarding the use of diverse language in multilingual English language classroom. The teachers were consulted individually making a phone call; a meeting was fixed explaining the purpose; and the meeting was organized accordingly. In the meeting, the questionnaires were distributed to the teachers; the intended meanings of all the questions were explained to them; and they were asked to respond the questionnaire individually. The researcher collected the information and informed the teachers that he would take a group interview with them after a considerable time, fixed the interview schedule with them and did accordingly.

The guideline of the interview was prepared on the basis of the analysis of the quantitative data collected from the teachers using the questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The qualitative data collected from the teachers using interview were analyzed and interpreted creating themes following Attride-Stirling's (2001) "thematic networks".

Results

The results have been described under two headings, namely 'the results of quantitative data' and 'the results of qualitative data'.

Results of Quantitative Data

In this part of the research article, frequency distributions of teachers' points of view regarding the use of linguistic diversity as a resource corresponding to each item in the questionnaire are discussed. The teachers' responses to the questionnaire can be analyzed as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. *Teacher's Ideologies on Linguistic Diversity as a Resource*

Item	Response	Frequency	Percent
1. Do you allow your students to use their home language(s)?	yes	2	25
	no	6	75
2. Do you encourage them to use their home language(s)?	yes	0	0.0
	no	8	100
3. Do you use their home language as a resource for English language teaching/learning?	yes	0	0.0
	no	8	100
4. Do you think that they will be happier and more engaged in learning if you use their home language with them?	yes	8	100
	no	0	0.0
5. Linguistic diversity can be used as a resource for teaching/learning of a second or foreign language in a multilingual classroom.	agreed	6	75
	disagreed	2	25
6. Bilingualism or multilingualism is a threat to social cohesion.	agreed	1	12.5
	disagreed	7	87.5

7. All the students' home languages should be allowed and respected in the classroom.	agreed	2	25
	disagreed	6	75
8. Children's home languages create problem in learning English. Therefore, they should not be allowed in English language teaching classroom.	agreed	8	100
	disagreed	0	0.0

The above Table (i.e., Table 1) shows that:

1. Only two teachers allow students to use their home language.
2. No one encourages them to use their home language(s).
3. No one uses the home language of students as a resource for English language teaching/learning.
4. But everyone believes that the students will be happier and more engaged in learning if you use their home language with them.
5. Six teachers agreed that linguistic diversity can be used as a resource for teaching/learning of a second or foreign language in a multilingual classroom.
6. Only 1 teacher believes that bilingualism or multilingualism is a threat to social cohesion.
7. Only 2 teachers accept that all the students' home languages should be allowed and respected in the classroom.
8. All the 8 teachers think that children's home languages create problem in learning English. Therefore, they should not be allowed in English language teaching classroom.

These points show contradiction in teachers' belief on linguistic diversity as a resource for teaching/learning of English.

Results of Qualitative Data

This section reveals the teachers' explanations for their beliefs or ideologies and even their responses to counter-arguments specially in relation to the use of students' home language as a resource elicited through interview with them.

The teachers' responses were found paradoxical or contradictory within and/or across them in the very beginning. But quite interestingly, all the teachers were found to

believe and support the importance, to some extents, of using linguistic diversity to further learning of English in bilingual or multilingual classrooms. However, they agreed that they have no or very little idea regarding the teaching and learning activities or techniques that use students' home language as a resource in English language teaching classroom.

Finally, every teacher was found to believe that:

1. The teacher should not only allow but also encourage students to use their home language(s).
2. The teacher also should use the students' home language as a resource for English language teaching/learning?
3. The students will be happier and more engaged in learning if you use their home language with them.
4. Linguistic diversity can be used as a resource for teaching/learning of a second or foreign language in a multilingual classroom.
5. Bilingualism or multilingualism is not a threat to social cohesion.
6. All the students' home languages should be allowed and respected in the classroom.
7. Children's home languages can be a resource in learning English. Therefore, they should be encouraged in English language teaching classroom.

After being aware of the importance of using students' home language (as they said, "The nature of the interaction gradually made us think positively towards the use of students' home languages in English language teaching classroom"), many ideas regarding the use of linguistic diversity as a resource for English language teaching or learning were found to flourish in the teachers' mind. Some of the ideas they thought of that conform with the use of linguistic diversity in English language teaching include:

1. In some contexts, home language makes easier to learn and understand English.
2. Teaching English as a second language using only English cannot be imagined.
3. We can use students' home language(s) to make students learn English.
4. We have to use students' home language to teach the concept of some objects specially when we cannot show their pictures or photos.
5. Multilingual dictionaries are beneficial.

6. Translation tools should be developed.
7. All ethnic groups including their language and culture should be equally treated.
8. There should not be dominance of one language over other(s).
9. Students can express their ideas and feelings quite easily and naturally if their home language is allowed.
10. We have to know how to use students' home language as a resource for teaching English.
11. Understanding more languages is to be richer.
12. We can ask students to tell (or write) folk stories related to their culture in their own language which can be translated into other students' home languages and finally into English involving all the students in the task.

Discussions

The results obtained from the analysis of the data have been discussed under different themes as follows:

Multilingual Awareness and Multilingual Ideology

Teachers should have “multilingual awareness” (Garcia, 2008) to be aware of multilingual ideologies, to internalize them, and to practice them in language teaching pedagogy. Following Garcia (2008: 385-386), all teachers should have “language awareness”, which encompasses the following three understandings:

1. *Knowledge of language (proficiency). (The language user)* Includes ability to use language appropriately in many situations; awareness of social and pragmatic norms.
2. *Knowledge about language (subject-matter knowledge). (The language analyst)* Includes forms and functions of systems—grammar, phonology, vocabulary.
3. *Pedagogical practice. (The language teacher)* Includes creating language learning opportunities; classroom interaction.

However, as maintained by Garcia (2008), only language awareness, i.e. only the understanding of above three things is not sufficient for teachers in bilingual or multilingual classrooms. The language teachers in multilingual classrooms should possess “multilingual awareness”, which builds a fourth understanding – “*the understanding of the social, political and economic struggles surrounding the use of the*

two [or more] languages” (Garcia, 2008: 387-388) – in addition to the three components of language awareness mentioned above.

Due to the teachers’ lack of multilingual awareness which also includes the knowledge of how to build on their students’ first language and literacy to develop literacy in the second, they are preoccupied with the only English monolingual ideology influenced by the top-down nature of language policy and practice, the pressure of parents’ interest and the fashion of English as a medium of instruction (EMI). When they became aware of all such things they all of a sudden changed their ideology regarding the use of linguistic diversity for teaching English in multilingual classrooms.

Just for an example, one of the informant teachers told a real story defending his only English monolingual ideology that:

Once, one Tamang-speaking student threatened in Tamang language to a student who does not understand Tamang that he would kill him by squeezing his throat. The listener student did not understand him and therefore did not react to his approaching to him, i.e. did not run away from him or so. Therefore, the Tamang student nearly killed the non-Tamang speaker student.

The teacher further argued that if they allow students’ home language(s) in school, different discipline problems as such occur. When I asked rhetorically what would happen if both the students or even all the students and teachers understand one-another’s language to some extent, then he understood what I meant and agreed with the fact that the sad thing he reported took place due to the lack of understanding of Tamang language. Moreover, due to the prohibition of students’ home languages in school, their usual meeting place, they do not get opportunity to learn each other’s language, as a result sad things as reported by the teacher may take place.

Weak Teacher Agency

The teacher agency to be strong they should have power of autonomy in one hand, and they should be researchers or at least they should have knowledge of research-based theories related to language teaching on the other hand. Teachers are very often influenced or affected by the ideology embraced by the parents such as English is the most important language, and it should be used as a medium of instruction from the very beginning of school education. In many schools, the English teachers are guided by the Head teacher’s ideology that English as a medium of instruction (EMI) can be a strategy for attracting students, and maintaining the existence

of school or increasing the number of students. Sending children in English-medium school is one of the indicators of social prestige for the parents.

While talking about the use of students' home language as a resource, one of the informant teachers asked a very interesting question: "As English teachers, how do we dare go against English? What other teachers and parents will think of us if we argue for allowing students their home languages in English language teaching classroom?"

This implies that the teachers do not know that only only-English policy has nothing to do with the quality education in one hand, and the students' home languages can be used as scaffolding for promoting learning of English on the other hand. The teachers are not aware of "the important role that the first language has on the development of the second, and of the interdependence of both languages" (Cummins, 1979). They do not know that "...if the pupil has already succeeded in their first language, it will mean faster progress with a second language" (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2015: 9), and that children's first language competence eventually supports learning the dominant languages. They do not know how to build on their students' first language and literacy to develop literacy in English. All this has made the power of teacher agency weak, and due to this weakness multilingual ideology supporting the use of linguistic diversity in language teaching remained unbloomed in context of Nepal.

Nuts Are Nutritious but Hard to Crack

Using linguistic diversity as a resource in English language teaching in multilingual classrooms is a very challenging task that centers around translanguaging pedagogy which requires teachers and students to use multiple home languages simultaneously "in a planned, developmental, and strategic manner, to maximize a student's linguistic and cognitive capability, and to reflect that language is sociocultural both in content and process" (Baker: 2011:290).

This also includes respecting multilingual identities, knowledge, histories, and struggles of multilingual learners. This demands multilingual teachers with the students' home languages. In this context, all of the informant teachers accepted that using students' home language as a resource in English language teaching classrooms is fruitful and justice for the students. But they said: "It is very difficult for a teacher with the linguistic background different from that of students. How to understand and use home languages of students in a multilingual classroom?" Then I counter-questioned, "Do not we expect the young children to learn (i.e., to understand and use) English – a language quite strange to them? If so, cannot we learn their language to some extent?"

One of the informants said “Quite logical argument, but very difficult to implement”. Then the utterance, “Nuts are nutritious but hard to crack” came out of my mouth. The teachers should be not only critical thinkers but also critical actors, and to be critical is not so easy task. But, at the same time, it is the teachers’ opportunity (analogous to nutritious food within the nut shell) to learn students home languages with them within their working hours in school.

Conclusions

Nepal being very fertile in its linguistic diversity in its national as well as provincial level, most classrooms in schools and colleges in Nepal are multilingual ones. Using, students’ home languages in school as a resource is the best way of linking home and school, which improves the academic success of English language learners. However, the teachers in context of Nepal were not found aware of the importance of using the students’ home language(s) to further learning of English. Therefore, the foremost task is to make them aware of the fact that the students’ home languages can be used as vehicles for successful English language acquisition. They should be convinced that students’ home languages in a multilingual classroom constitute valuable resources. For this, all the English language teacher training/education programmes/courses should be oriented towards what, why and how aspects of using linguistic diversity as a resource in multilingual language teaching classrooms.

Professional teacher development, “multilingual awareness” (Garcia, 2008) development, strengthening the power of teacher agency, development of teacher motivation and devotion, critical awareness development, and so on are the preliminary things to be acted upon for the development of teachers’ culture of using, and thereby respecting students’ home languages, identities, cultures and other things they bring school from home as a resource to further learning of English.

References

- Attride-Stirling, Jennifer (2001). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.
- Baker, Collin (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (5th ed.). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Bateman, John A.; Kruijff-Korvayova, Ivana & Kruijff, Geert-Jan (2005). Multilingual resource sharing across both related and unrelated languages: An implemented, open-source framework for practical natural language generation.
- Creese, Angela & Blackledge, Adrian (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching. *The Modern Language Journal*, 94(1), 103-115.
- Block, David (2014). *Social class in applied linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, Suresh (2011a). Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(3), 401-417.
- Canagarajah, Suresh (2011b). Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Suresh_Canagarajah/publication/279558643_Translanguaging_in_the_Classroom_Emerging_Issues_for_Research_and_Pedagogy/links/56310bc308ae3de9381cdc39/Translanguaging-in-the-Classroom-Emerging-Issues-for-Research-and-Pedag.
- Cummins, Jim (1979). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 222-251.
- Cummins, Jim (2006). Identity texts: The imaginative construction of self through multiliteracy pedagogy. In O. Gracia, T. Skutnab-Kangas, & M. E. Torres-Guzman (Eds.), *Imagining multilingual schools: Languages in education and globalization* (pp. 51-68). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Doile, Louise; Brady, Anne-Marie & Byrne, Gobnait (2016). An overview of mixed methods research - revisited. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 21(8), 623-635.
- Garcia, Ofelia (2008). Multilingual language awareness and teacher education. In J. Cenoz, & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (2nd ed., Vol. 6, pp. 385-400). New York: Springer.

- Garcia, Ofelia & Sylvan, Claire E. (2001). Pedagogies and practices in multilingual classrooms: Singularities in pluralities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(3), 385-400.
- Heath, Stephen B. (1989). Language ideology. In *International encyclopedia of communications*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Irvine, Judith T. (1989). When talk isn't cheap: Language and political economy. *American Ethnologist*, 16(2), 248-267.
- Jessner, Ulrike (2008). Multicompetence approaches to language proficiency development in multilingual education. In *Encyclopedia of language and education* (2nd ed., Vol. 5, pp. 91-103).
- Kroskrity, Paul V. (2009). Language renewal as sites of language ideological struggle: The need for ideological clarification. In J. Reyhner, & L. Lockard (Eds.), *Indigenous language revitalization: Encouragement, guidance and lessons learned* (pp. 71-83). Flagstaff, Arizona: Northern Arizona University.
- Phyak, Prem (2016). *'For our cho:tlung': Decolonizing language ideologies and (re)examining multilingual education policies and practices in Nepal*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Hawai'i, Manoa.
- Ruiz, Richard. (1984). Orientations in language planning. *NABE Journal*, 8(2), 346-361.
- Silverstein, Michael (1979). Language structure and linguistic ideology. In P. R. Clyne, W. F. Hanks, & C. L. Hofbauer (Eds.), *The elements: A parsession on linguistic units and levels* (pp. 193-247). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Wallen, Matthew, & Kelly-Holmes, Hellen (2015). Developing language awareness for teachers of emergent bilingual learners using dialogic inquiry. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1-17.