The Judicious Integration of LI in ESL Learning Contexts

By

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Abstract

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The use of L1 in English as a Second Language learning contexts is a ubiquitous but haphazard pedagogical practice within Sri Lanka. This thesis examines whether the use of L1 (in this case, Sinhala) could be validated across high, intermediate, and low learner proficiency levels in English. Under the premise of judicious integration, the study argues to confine the area of incorporation to mechanisms of lexical comprehension in written modalities. The complex ontological and epistemological milieu of ESL in Sri Lanka granted an entrée for scrutinizing the sociolinguistic background of the participants (n = 270, mean age 23 years) which highlighted a need for judicious use of L1 in ESL learning contexts. Justification for integrating L1 came from low and of intermediate proficiency respondents (99% and 88% respectively) who declared a need for L1 glosses for difficult lexicon. Further justification was obtained from performance statistics at two related skills at lexical comprehension: inferring and dictionary consultation. The low level learners were rarely successful at inferring word meaning (% mean = 26.33) and their performance at dictionary consultation skills was equally low (% mean = 26.7). Moreover, the intermediate learners too, demonstrated poor inferring skills (% mean = 31.0) and middling dictionary skills (% mean = 55.0). The high proficiency learners who revealed a high % mean of
70.0 at inferring skills and middling performance at dictionary skills (% mean = 63.7) too, expressed a 76.6% preference for L1 glosses.

Thus the main study amassed evidence to verify whether the integration of L1 to lexical processing mechanisms could be authenticated across all proficiency levels. It examined the effects of three variables: English, Sinhala and No Gloss conditions on text comprehension. The Chi square tests identified that high proficiency learners performed at a static high mean level under all three gloss conditions (% mean EG - 82.67, SG - 82.67, NG - 72.67%). Collaborating evidence was obtained from their % self assessed text comprehension statistics EG – 72.30%, SG – 74.00 %, NG – 71.66%. These findings validated the expulsion of high proficiency learners from the procedures of L1 integration on the basis that their text comprehension is not dependent on provision of glosses and as they possess fairly developed skills at inferring and dictionary consultation. Conversely a significant mean increase across the intermediate and the low proficiency learners was revealed under the SG condition. The Mann Whitney test for median comparison which examined whether the two underlying populations were centered differently revealed a significant phenomenon. The performance of the two populations showed identical statistical median comparison estimates. The median comparison for both populations was equal and low for NG and EG conditions while there was a comparative increase in performance under the SG condition (NG = EG < SG). As a corollary, in the process of scaffolding these findings to pedagogy, the study confines integrating L1 to skill development in lexical comprehension mechanisms in low and intermediate proficiency learners in ESL contexts and discusses developing L2 inferring skills in the high proficiency learners.