Using Students' Linguistic Repertoires For Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Tajikistan

Tojiniso Olimnazarova, University of Birmingham

Summary:

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USING STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRES FOR TEACHING
ENGLISH AS A FOREGIN LANGUAGE IN TAJIKISTAN

The contentious debate over whether students' L1 should be used in the
English (L2) classroom or not has continued for a long time. The monolingual
approach has recently been challenged by a number of researchers in the
field of second language acquisition (SLA) who have now begun to advocate
an approach to language teaching which draws on the students' existing
multilingual resources.

This study has focused on the potentials of using students' full linguistic
repertoires in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in
Tajikistan. The research was carried out as a case study of the School of
Professional and Continuing Education in GBAO, Tajikistan, drawing on
extensive data from classroom observations and interviews. Linguistic
ethnography has been adopted as an approach for an in-depth analysis of
classroom discourse. The findings from this research provide robust evidence
that the use of students' full linguistic repertoires presents a range of
possibilities that can facilitate the teaching and learning processes. Using L1
was found to be beneficial for key pedagogic functions such as keeping
pedagogic tasks moving and providing equity of participation in small group-
and whole-class discussions. Further research into the potentials of L1 use
needs to be conducted to show why bilingual instructional strategies are
legitimate. The pedagogical recommendations suggested by this dissertation
highlight the role of language teacher training and teacher development
programmes in paying more attention to the facilitative role that L1 can play in
supporting effective second/foreign language learning.

Significance:

This outstanding and exceptional piece of research uses developing theory in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and critical pedagogy to challenge long held dogmas in CLT regarding the use of other languages for teaching and learning English. Drawing on theories of dynamic bilingualism and translanguaging the study shows the pedagogic possibilities of flexible bilingualism as teachers and students use Tajik, Russian, and a local language, Shughni, to learn English in Tajikistan. Arguing against the monolingual bias in CLT, the research outlines the potential of using student and teacher's linguistic resources for learning English. Multilingual interactions are carefully analysed using a linguistic ethnographic approach. Classroom data are exceptionally rich and are analysed for their multilingual pedagogic potential drawing on a languaging framework to question the boundaries between languages. The study successfully uses the concept of communicative repertoire for describing successful language learning in English.

While arguments for translanguaging as pedagogy and practice are gaining momentum in theorising and researching the multilingual classrooms of New York, London, and Birmingham, little research exists for its potential significance in EFL teaching and learning contexts. This study makes an original and important contribution in showing its relevance beyond bilingual educational settings. Using a literature on bilingualism and multilingualism to critically and creatively evaluate the domains of EFL and CLT, the study successfully presents new perspectives on language teaching. Set in an ideological context which typically argues for a monolingual approach, the study shows how students and teachers draw on their multilingual linguistic repertoires to facilitate the English language learning process in University classrooms. In the author's own words, "the study shows that the use of the students' existing languages does not reduce students' exposure to English, but rather these languages play a supportive and facilitating role in the English classrooms." Listing eleven benefits to a multilingual approach, the study finds that the multilingual pedagogy increases equity in classroom participation, produces better understandings of grammar, general knowledge and key concepts.

The dissertation has the potential for high impact and is likely to shape new approaches to language teaching in the Tajikistan University context. Certainly the author's position as a teacher developer and department head for the 16 English teachers she supervises means that her study will have an immediate and local impact. However, the potential for impact is much wider than this. Bilingual educators for a long time have been arguing that multilingual learning is maximized when learners are allowed and enabled to draw from across their existing language skills. The wider impact of this study is to document these possibilities in an EFL context. This research challenges the constraining and inhibiting monolingual assumptions behind too much language teaching today. The study has the potential to be published in a high ranking peer review language in applied linguistics.