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Integrative and Interactive Approaches to the Teaching of
Reading in Singapore Secondary Schools
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Language Learning Approaches:

While second language learning approaches show a more learner centered approach in its design of syllabus, materials and evaluation many English language classrooms in many Asian countries continue to emphasise a grammar-centered curriculum rather than communicative proficiency. This paper considers reading research in relation to metacognitive development as well as some of the issues in relation to teaching reading using an interactive approach.

Metacognitive Strategies

Teacher training courses in language teaching programmes at NIE in Singapore having been giving emphasis to the training of metacognitive strategies for language learning, especially for reading and writing tasks. In reading an interactive approach is emphasised using metacognitive strategies arising from schema theory such as the use of prior knowledge, world knowledge and the strategy of prediction.

Metacognition is defined as knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes. The skills of metacognition are those attributed to the theories of human memory and cognitive psychology (Brown et al, 1986). Some of the attributes in metacognition is referred to in the literature as (metamemory, metalearning, metaattention, metalanguage).

Learners who struggle in making sense of reading demands in the curriculum) need to be trained in double-checking e.g. all the contextual clues in reading before accepting the answer he has arrived at as a fact. All the steps that refer to processes, to the active monitoring of these processes in relation to the cognitive tasks learners have to carry out in problem solving is regarded as metacognition.

Two main theories psycholinguistic theory and schema theory (Rumelhart 1980 and Anders and Lloyd 1989) make references to metacognitive processes and metalinguistic awareness. They include processes involved in inferencing the text, using the linguistic, lexical and contextual clues, cohesive devices, discourse markers and

(2) the strategic knowledge to select for retrieval cues (linguistic and semantic information that they have missed previously. The knowledge base must include at least some forms of metacognition or self-knowledge

Studies show that successful mature learners use (1) information concerning their current state of knowledge, that is, what they know of the text (i.e. it comes from earlier reading, therefore extensive reading, and other learning experiences (both from print and non-print materials and experiences).

Studies show that good readers use appropriate schemata for interpretation. Schemata refers to what each person builds up - the processes of recall of prior knowledge, perception, remembering (both short term and long term memory), understanding discourse, as well as of learning and problem solving. In reading the theory refers to reader background knowledge and the nature of inferential processes.

It is therefore recommended that pupils need to be trained in reading strategies. Strategies of anticipation and prediction are strategies learners need to be trained to use. Further teachers need to train pupils for the following:

(i) facilitate use of prior knowledge (Irwin)
(ii) facilitate use of short-term and long-term memory
(iii) to recognise organizational structure of text, i.e. text structures
e.g. problem-solution, cause-effect, comparison, narrative, description etc.)
(Meyer1984)

Thus the coordination of these forms of knowledge demands a sophisticated learner. It is therefore not surprising that efficient performance on the part of the learner takes a long time to emerge.

This in turn means that teachers have an important role to play. Teachers need to diagnose learners needs and problems and help to develop strategies that will help them to interpret and respond to text.
Teachers then are not there merely to assign or test reading tasks and exercises.

Communicative Language teaching (CLT) theory and practice has used as the starting point, suggestions for an activity-based, task-based and an interactive approach to involve learners in language learning.

Training the language learner in interactive reading and writing related tasks involves the following:

1.   the learner clarifying the purposes of reading, that is,
       (i) understanding the task demands i.e. why they are reading what they
           are reading

2.   learning to make inferential responses to the writer's message

3.   focusing attention on concepts rather than superficial/supplementary
       infomation

In pedagogy we have suggested that teaching materials need to include an **(i) activity based approach** that should include **(ii) interactive activities, (iii) task based activities, (iv) project work**. The following guidelines are used in training programmes in Singapore (refer to Grellet and Mikulecky 1989).

What is Reading? : definitions, concepts, prior beliefs of trainee-teachers

Part of the training considered how trainees defined reading and what prior beliefs trainees had on the subject of learning to read. The following questions are discussed during training sessions:

(i)   What is the place of traditional approaches to teaching language?
(ii)   What is the place of reading aloud?
(iii) Is reading the same as reading aloud to check fluency in reading?
(iv)   Is reading the same as checking correct pronunciation?
(v)   Is reading the same as being able to read the words?
(vi)   Is reading the same as cheking fluency?
(vii) What then is the purpose of the reading lesson?
(viii) How do we train pupils to recognise the purposes of reading?
(ix)   How should you set objectives for the reading lessons?

Textbooks verses authentic materials?

Will a single textbook be sufficient or a set of textbooks?
What is the place of teacher made materials?
What is the place of authentic materials?
How does pupil motivation relate to teacher-made materials?

Reading and Writing links
We need to make learners aware of the links between reading and writing. The reading experience helps learners to learn to write. The reading experience makes learners

(i) aware of language structures, discourse structures, word power.
(ii)It also makes them aware of ideas, concepts, the writer's thoughts, in short the world of ideas and thoughts.

Genres

In writing for instance, the focus is on techniques that develop fluency and accuracy: we train learners to use the skills of composing, through brainstorming, elaborating, developing ideas as well as editing, revising and publication.

By using reading tasks we can help to model writing. By using a variety of genres for reading we can develop a variety of genres in writing.

Language structures in written texts:

By discussing the structures in reading texts the learner is made aware of the structures in writing and be trained then to adapt some of these into his own writing.

Cultural context of language learning

I will conclude by stating that teachers and teacher trainers should consider the place of cultural context, community attitudes toward learning a new language such as English, and a review of traditional teacher-student relationships that will help towards making a success of teaching strategies and approaches.

What is the cultural context of learning a second language in Singapore, the Phillipines, India or Honghong?

One possible answer is to convince our learners about the functional use of language learning. That language is for communication with our peers, for social interaction, for making sense of our lives. That once we have learned a new language we are able to use it in the way we want, whether it is for letter writing, understanding the latest lyrics over MTV music programmes that all young learners listen to, the latest in the international pop scene, or to win a place in a learning institution or a tertiary institution. The learner needs to be given empowerment, ownership to the language he is studying and learning to use. A prescriptive approach will only dampen his motivation. An interactive approach that trains him to use strategies will help him move towards mastery of the target language. Learners it is observed are willing and motivated when language learning is purposeful and meaningful, when he need it for his communicative needs.

We need to be aware of the cultural context, to accept elements from the learners and speakers own cultural context, i.e. the prevalence of variation from Standard English. In Singapore we have several multi-lectal varieties of English, from Singlish to an acrolectal variety spoken by educated speakers. Similaraly In Phillipines, we have Taglish, a mixture of Fipilina and English, and in Hongkong and China, a variety called Chinglish. These local varieties reflect a sence of indentity with your kind, solidarity and frienship with your own linguistic communities.   We recognise that the local varieties are for informal occasions and that the target language is used during formal occasions. Creating an awareness of the uses of the different lects for their appropriate settings, occasions, intercoulouters and domains of use helps learners grapple with the demands of the prescriptive approaches in the classroom.

We need therefore to make links with the cultural and social purposes that young learners have, for example, interaction with their peer groups.

Finally I would like to point out that as language teachers we need to link learning with the work world, with technical or industrial training or with the commercial world as in the tourist industry. All these links that we make will help to motivate learners into making language learning a succes.

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Colloquialism: Bilingualism Through The Classroom
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Response to Elizabeth M. Liew's Paper:
'Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis Revisited in the Brunei
Classroom'

Bilingualism and Bidialectism in Multilingual Societies

Brunei's Bilingual Education Policy

Liew addresses several national concerns arising out of
Brunei's multilingual setting: several indigenous languages are
spoken, for example, Iban, Dusun, Kedayan, Tutong, Belait, Murut,
all distinct from Brunei Malay as well as Bahasa Melayu and
English.

Brumei has made a pragmatic choice with Bahasa Malay as its
national language, and retained English (L2) for pragmatic
reasons. English is regarded as both regional and global lingua
franca. Brunei has a Malay-Moslem cultural identity and Bruneians
are confident and do not see their language and culture under
threat from such policies. Similarly pragmatic language policies
have been institutionalised in Singapore and some that were
unpopular to Chinese-educated Singaporeans. [1]

Liew reports that what appears to be more functional amongst
the language codes is Brunei Malay which is the mother tongue of
Bruneians. This is the dominant language used in the school
setting and the lingua franca amongst the various speech
communities. It is universally accepted that children grow and
develop using their mother tongue for various communicative
purposes. It is natural for Brunei children to use Brunei Malay
to communicate, to socialise, to interact, to play with others,
and even more significant for educational success i.e. 'to
understand the teacher in order to learn' (Liew). Similarly in
Singapore, depending on their sociolinguistic background children
use their mother tongue which could be a Chinese dialect or
Mandarin, Tamil, Malay or the range of low to formal varieties
of English for early school education, socialisation and for the
functions Liew describes. In Singapore schools Gupta (1994:135)
states that instructions are given in the perceived repertoire
of the children being addressed. Languages other than English are
used as a bridge to English, through transalation and Singapore
Colloquial English and is used as a bridge to Standard Singapore
English.

Liew expresses several national concerns, one being the lack
of learners' proficiency in both Bahasa Melayu and in English.
Educators in Brunei accept the principle that acquisition of

Bahasa Melayu will support the learning of English, that bilingual language learning will increase proficiency in both Bahasa Melayu and English. The belief is that transfer of knowledge and learning process takes place across languages, and that competence in L1 can facilitate the acquisition of L2.

Some of the related pedagogical concerns Liew expresses refer to the comparative language data that shows that there are structural differences between Brunei Malay and Bahasa Melayu. Children it is reported use several strategies to manage the various language codes. They meet their language needs by extending meanings, borrowing from English, creating, inventing and code-mixing and code-switching. While all these strategies may be regarded as intrusive this is not necessarily a bad thing as this helps children to make up for the inadequate language and vocabulary in whichever language code they choose to operate.

As an educator the pedagogical decision taken to allow children to use their mother tongue when they enter school, to allow classroom and school communication through Brunei Malay, is I believe a sound pedagogical decision. [2] As educators we accept that support for learning comes through bilingual teachers allowing for a transitional stage where teachers' instructions, presentations are in the mother tongue, i.e. Brunei Malay during which there is a gradual transition to Standard Bahasa Melayu. The use of Bahasa Melayu for all formal language skills e.g. reading and writing should provide the transition to the use of the target language. Reading and language acquisition approaches such as the RELA which is now being used in Brumei schools should provide for adequate oracy activities leading to writing skills in English.

The reality though is that not all children will become balanced bilinguals that is, competent in both languages. There is bound to be a range in the levels of acquisition and attainment.

Bilingualism and Bidialectism

While several models based on immersion programmes are available to language planners and educators we need our own home grown studies to provide evidence on the learning patterns of successful bilingual learners. These studies need to go beyond quantifying 'errors' made by learners.

Several areas need to be researched upon in order to provide a clearer picture of patterns of bilingual acquisition. I would like to raise the possibility of research in the following areas:

i) As educators we are aware that positive results accrue from bilingualism if there is a high level of proficiency. What are therefore some areas of data collection that we need to identify to provide more insights to the linguistic acquisition and learning patterns of bilingual learners from a complex

sociolinguistic, socio-cultural setting such as Brunei and Singapore, Hongkong and the Philippines? This could lead to areas of collaborative research between Brunei, Singapore, Hongkong and the Philippines.

While there are many models available for analyzing bilingual acquisition and evaluating immersion programmes (Cummins 1978,1980) we need refinements and modifications to the existing models to help analyze the very complex multilingual settings that we have in countries such as Brunei Singapore and Hongkong.

ii) To what extent are current language learning models adequate for identifying the processes involved in the cognitive and linguistic development of bilingual learners?

iii) In what ways do the complex social and cultural contexts in settings such as Brunei, Singapore, Hongkong and the Philippines impinge upon the acquisition of languages?

iv) Several processes take place when languages are in contact. Human information processing strategies, for instance, may differ because the linguistic information is presented in different forms as in Chinese and English. When there is maximum similarity between linguistic systems, greater competence is expected in reading, writing skills.

Some issues that can be raised are the following:
To what extent does transfer take place? What are the processes and patterns when language are in contact, for instance, translation, interference, and interlanguage patterns that emerge. To what extent would these be acceptable to norm-setters such as teachers and educators?

v) One strategy that bilinguals use is the strategy of code-switching which involves the deliberate use of cross-linguistic resources in order to find and generate new ideas. Should the strategy of code-switching by teachers and learners to be encouraged in the bilingual classroom (Wong 1994,Martin 1995).

In the Singapore context we do not have a large number of studies that explore these issues. A study by Wong (1994) looks at strategies used by Chinese-English learners.

Wong considers several questions that arise in considering the processes of language learning amongst Chinese-English bilingual writers and these may be applied to bilinguals in Brunei:

i) What are some of the processes that take place when weak writers use Chinese, English, Brunei Malay, Bahasa Melayu or Tagalog to perform language tasks?

ii) What sort of thinking patterns can we observe when they think in Chinese, English, Brunei Malay, Bahasa Melayu or

Tagalog? The use of 'think aloud' protocols will help teachers observe the use of or the absence of various strategies by bilingual learners.

Wong (1994) discusses studies that consider how bilinguals write if the language of writing is the language related to the acquisition of the topic area of knowledge. Several research studies arise from this aspect:

iii) What are the topic areas of knowledge in content area subjects in the bilingual curriculum in Brunei? How do Brunei bilinguals handle tasks in history which is taught in Malay? Does it differ when the topic is science and is taught in English. What are some of the learning strategies used by successful bilingual students?

Wong's (1994) study, for instance, showed that there were fewer instances of learners thinking in or using Chinese when writing in English. When bilinguals were writing in Chinese, think aloud protocols showed transfer of strategies from English to Chinese.

Wong observed that while ineffective writers did occasionally monitor grammatical forms, apply, check grammatical rules, and spelling, that is, the mechanics of writing, successful writers had a clearer understanding of the language tasks and therefore tended to tune to message, audience and meaning for successful completion of tasks.

Sociolinguistic factors in bilingual societies:

Kuo and Jernud (1994) on language management in Singpaore discuss how centralised language planning usually implies a top-down approach that involves decision making and implementation. But other aspects at the interactional level of speech communities need to be observed. Some of their observations are that (i) there is tremendous linguistic diversification, (ii) there is the use of both high and low varieties in various domains, (iii) there is diglossia in both English and other languages, (iv) indigenous norms are developing in English, Chinese and Tamil. This gives rise to a number of implications for the classroom, for pedagogy, for evaluation and examinations. Teachers, teacher trainers and educators as norm setters have to take decisions about norms, standards and appropriacy.

My own work on studies of varieties of Singapore English now includes other macro and micro issues couched within bilingualism and sociolinguistics, to some of the socio- cultural factors that may provide some of the explanations for the different attainment levels, for instance, the use of various language codes amongst bilingual learners. Studies are being conducted on language shift patterns, attitudinal and motivational patterns of language use amongst the Chinese (Ang, 1994), Indian (Saravanan, 1994) and Malay (Ayuub,1994) linguistic communities. [3]

As teachers are norm setters it is important to know the pedagogic decisions taken by teachers in Brunei on norms and standards. [4]

Other sociolinguistic studies needed in Brunei are studies on attitudes toward the learning of various languages. For instance, what is the status of Bahasa Melayu and English among students with various linguistic backgrounds? In Brunei the prevalent impression given is one where English appears to be playing an increasingly important role though in reality mixed language is the norm (Martin 1995). Similarly in Singapore as language shift towards English is reported, it has also been observed that other cohorts of young Singaporeans choose Chinese to speak to their peers in the domains of school, home and in the choice of language code for media and entertainment. The choice of language code is determined to some extent by the linguistic background of the speaker, emphasis given to language codes in school and the socialisation patterns in the community and at home.

Surveys and studies need to include not only children from mainstream families, from middle-class background but also children from other socio-economic, cultural backgrounds. Bahasa Melayu has prestige, is institutionalised and is used in formal contexts, but Brunei Malay is the mother tongue and used more widely in informal domains, to express solidarity and rapport. English is also used in variety of domains. What are therefore the patterns of language use and of code-switching and code-mixing amongst bilingual children in Brunei?

Studies on patterns of maintenance and shift in the language codes used over the generations need to include the use of Brunei Malay and the indigenous languages. To what extent have some of the community languages or indigenous languages been replaced by Bahasa Melayu or by English amongst bilingual learners and in the community at large in Brunei? Which of the speech communities show additive bilingualism and which of these subtractive bilingualism in Brunei? This will provide information on cases of additive and subtractive bilingualism.

Many of these research questions raised and suggested are being investigated by researchers in Brunei. The results of these studies will throw some light on future refinements that need to be undertaken in curriculum development, and the development of materials and resources to support the acquisition of languages and the acquisition of content area knowledge for the different cohorts of students with different needs.

Educational Support

Bilingualism provides support to the political and economic development of the country. Strong educational support and pedagogical support is therefore needed in the form of trained teachers, curriculum materials and books to help develop Brunei children to become effective bilinguals.

While educators tend largely to depend on Children's Literature in English and in Malay and other languages published abroad, there is a need to look towards publishing books that have the socio-cultural setting of children growing up in Brunei. This is especially so for children who are not within the mainstream of the socio-cultural setting of any society. [5]

Community Support

Community support is necessary to help with the tasks of developing and supporting the linguistic domains and the functional uses of language codes acquired by children. Community support may take the form of community organisations that help organise language and culture activities where language is linked to a range of cultural activities; oracy activities, observation of traditions, rituals, customs that use language to give expression to these activities, as well as with the creative activities of music, drama and dance.

In Singapore the Speak Mandarin Campaign which has been organised over the past 15 years has shifted from hard sell to soft peddling. Pang a member of the committee said that, for example, Mandarin usage has been attributed even to the use of Mandarin in karaoke lounges. It is regarded as fun with no examinations.The Malay community has organised Bulan Bahasa campaigns and to make a breakthrough to the young included Malay Scrabble, folktales, charades, puppet shows and nursery rhymes in their activities.

Conclusion

As educators we recognise that in the evaluation of bilingual policies, success in language planning policies lead to success in national development. This is true of both Brunei and Singapore which have benefitted from using English as one of the languages of education and the working language in the nation. Pragmatic linguistic policies have helped to contribute to technological development and the urbanisation and modernisation of both Brunei and Singapore.

Endnotes

1.Last Sunday, June the 4th, the prime minister of Singapore speaking on the merger of the former Nanyang University (medium of instruction, Chinese) and Singapore University (medium of instruction, English) said that if both universities had been retained, it would have perpetuated the gulf between the Chinese-educated and the English educated, a 'faultline' Singapore could ill-afford. Speaking of the Nantah alumni he said that their 'Chineseness' and Confucianist values are as essential as the 'Malayness', 'Indianess', and Western orientation of Singaporeans in making Singapore a cosmopolitan nation.

2.In Singapore it was decided that language acquisition for Chinese bilinguals should begin in Mandarin rather than in their various mother tongues as soon as possible in the home and in the pre-school domain. Speaking in anyone of the Chinese dialects was

discouraged. However some educators believe that Chinese families and children who spoke dialect as their mother tongue would have faced initial difficulties and motivational problems in not being allowed to use their mother tongue (their dialect) as a transitional stage in acquiring Mandarin.

3. While the dominant linguistic code is Tamil amongst the Indian group, strong community lobbying and support has lead to the introduction of Hindi, Bengali, Gujerati and Urdu language classes and examinations for primary six, 'O' and 'A' levels for these linguistic minorities.

4. A study was started recently by (Gloria P and V. Saravanan 1994-1996) on Teachers' attitudes towards the various systems of English pronunciation heard in Singapore' and 'Teachers' opinions about the appropriacy of each variety for the Singapore classroom.'

5. Saravanan (1995) in a review of Tamil textbooks entitled 'Linguistic and cultural maintenance through education for minority groups in Singapore: in the SEAMEO Anthology Series 36, noted that there were few cultural references, of practices and beliefs of Indians and of other multi- ethnic, multi-cultural groups in Singapore. Texts which were translated from English showed that there were inconsistencies in the use of Tamil linguistic structures, syntax, discourse and style.

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