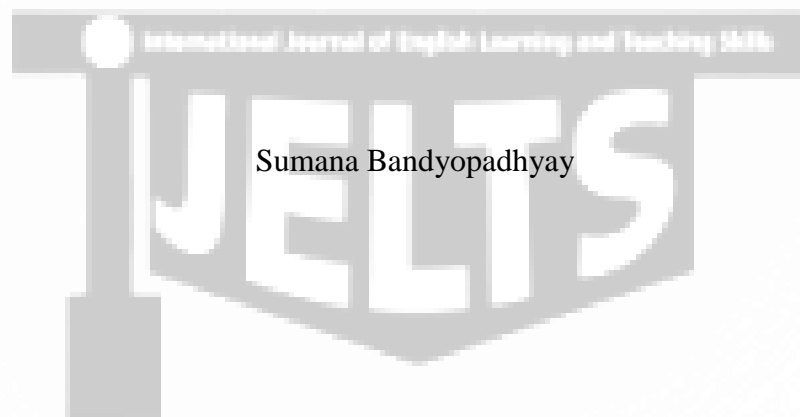


LANGUAGE ACROSS DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY – FIRST LANGUAGE IMPACT
ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION



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Introduction

Cameron, 2001, states that child language development begins with a lexical base. Earlier, in the L1 classes at the primary level, the focus was on the spelling and vocabulary with an emphasis on the reading and pronunciation. These lexical bases although known and familiar, were unknown for spelling. The new words introduced were learnt by focusing on syllables. The spellings had to be learnt by heart and from successful performances in spelling tests. But the learning methodology has changed over the years. Adding to the primary level of school system, learning the above language skills are learnt through the following tasks and activities. The language elements from Shahj path pratham bhag for standard 1 are analysed as:

- a. Rhymes with the consonant and vowel phonemes comprising simple nouns and verbs with following exercises on minimal pairs, vocabulary and sentence structure.
- b. Vocabulary tasks are accompanied by: 1. Opposite words, 2. Meaning explanation, 3. Fill up the blanks/ provide appropriate words', 4. Pictorial identification, 5. Form words with jumbled alphabets.
- c. Activities for Sentence are: 1. Comprehension questions, and 2. Form sentences with prompts.

The subject content of the texts is mainly focused on learning new vocabulary and their spelling, simple sentence structures. These are i) poems on animals in their natural habitats, nature, and ii) short stories. From first lesson to the third the texts are graded with more noun-

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verb combination structures. For the language areas which are difficult for children to learn, and to strengthen their willingness and enthusiastic nature in the learning without negative impacts, L1 can be used contextually. These areas are: auditory discrimination, morphology, picture vocabulary test and sentence repetition. L1 can be used for giving instructions and for overall comprehension at the beginning. To strengthen student's capacity to learn content vocabulary and concepts, simulation in to the language for a few years is necessary. Research indicates that second language learners learn the irregular past tense forms of a few verbs before they learn to apply the –ed; regular form. And learning other tense markers is not simultaneous but gradual. To activate the background knowledge of L1 and to overcome lapses in the learning of L2, learners sometimes avoid using the structures which they find difficult to learn. And if not put to attention at the beginning, this may never become a part of the learner's systematic knowledge. For relative clauses, according to research, second language learners learn to use the subject and the direct object (nouns) before they learn to use indirect object and object of preposition. This is referred as accessibility hierarchy by Lightbrown and Spada, 2003. Starting from object of comparison, a child who can use relative clauses for possessives will also learn to use it for object of preposition, indirect object, direct object and subject. When learners reach a certain stage of language learning, they may learn a second language rule but restrict its application. For example, in our second language context, dropping of articles before nouns or varied use of articles. When they find a similarity with L1, they may learn faster, for example the verb inflections for person and number.

The 5 stages of language acquisition (Haynes and Zacarian, 2010: 10) are starting, emerging, developing, expanding and bridging. These stages in our L2 context reflect the following:

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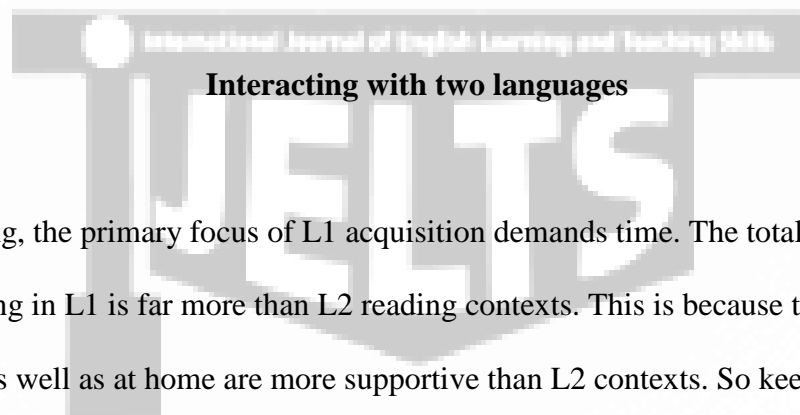
- i) Starting / acquiring receptive vocabulary – from listening to others speaking in the language.
- ii) Emerging early production after six months, focusing on the words one at a time.
- iii) Developing choral reading activities using flash cards, duet – communicate using short phrases.
- iv) Expanding i.e., analyse, predict, create, debate, hypothesize in English.
- v) Bridging close to native English speakers with accuracy and fluency.

L2 teachers can connect the new information (from L2), to the learners' linguistic, personal, cultural, social backgrounds so that the hindrances caused by the presence of L1 can be turned into advantages. A prominent factor in this presence is unable to acquiring native like pronunciation. L1 influence can make it difficult to notice something which they practice is absent in L2. For the starting stage of first language acquisition at school, i.e., from the age 5 or 6, meaning constructing activity and language use are introduced. These one / two words meaning construction of a lexical base is basically learning synonyms or explaining with familiar words. So language learning at the starting stages is supported by constructing meaning for the activities on vocabulary, and according to research, understanding this support activity is essential for language learning. The emerging stage, i.e., at 7 years of age, children acquire the skills for extended discourse. This include reciting poems from the texts, reading narratives etc. According to Cameron, “ A connection has been found between children's early experiences with language use in their families, and their language development in various domains. ” p 13. Children who are in contact with the narrative language at home develop narrative and discourse skills faster. Developing stage – all language learners in their developing stage come across an interlanguage situation which is

not similar to L1 and far away from L2. If this interlanguage is similar but not identical with L1, then they need to put in more effort for the target language. If the interlanguage is similar to L2 then they will gradually move away from the interlanguage situation. We as teachers of second language, teach according to our learners needs, banking on our ideas and preferences about our own learning. Reflecting on our views on how languages (both first language and second language) are learnt and how they should be taught, the first language learning impact on second language learning is discussed.

Lightbrown and Spada, 2003, state that prior knowledge of first language is the idea of how languages work. But it also leads learners of incorrect guesses about how second language works. This is the area where the second language teacher can motivate learners to learn with correct guesses. In the context, the question is – is the focus going to be on form or on meaning? In the primary stages of learning, language is acquired from associating familiar forms (sound segments, syllables, morphemes). And the emphasis is more on form and then gradually on meaning. Listen and read is a text book activity, where the learner reads along with the teacher to hear and understand the first language. This activity for second language implies that the teacher speaks while the learner listens and learns. For learning by structural instruction it is necessary to drill and memorize spelling and pronunciation in order to learn them. According to Wright, 1997, for children of 7 years of age, literature can be used in foreign language teaching, (in our context, Second Language) for creating thematic structures through language. For this methodology, stories in first language, interpreted in second language can be used for developing skills in extended discourse. Then, the learners can access the modified input in a natural acquisition environment, would be in contact with a variety of language and discourse types and would be under pressure to speak. But transfer of cues from first language for a different language is not fruitful. So transfer of information in

familiar places, which needs the teacher's prior thought out transfer of strategies from L1 to L2 may help learners to notice the cues of the new language. For example, word order, word endings, and morphemes as tense markers. Bates and Mac Whinney's 'Competition Model' of linguistic performance, 1989, states that different languages have different ways of carrying meaning, or 'cues' to interpret the meaning of what is said. For example, whole day, interpreted as morning to dusk is same in L1 and L2 for our learners. But, 'never' in L2 is at no time/ not at all, while in L1 is represented by 'ko-khon-o' (time) in the lexical base. To help learners notice the cues of L2, the L1 lexicon may be mentioned.



Reading, the primary focus of L1 acquisition demands time. The total time for learning reading in L1 is far more than L2 reading contexts. This is because the resources for L1 at school as well as at home are more supportive than L2 contexts. So keeping in view the L1 learning differences, some of these abilities can be adopted for L2 learning.

- a. Cultivation of effective instructional practices to yield meaningful and purposeful teacher-lead enquiry in the L2 classroom. The linguistic knowledge bases and strategies for learning are influenced by these kind of teacher-lead inquiries.
- b. Connecting L2 text to readers knowledge base i.e., connecting a character, event, concept to the discourse in L1.
- c. Identifying problem-solution and cause effect contexts in texts – comprehension questions and answers on the discourse, stating meanings from pictures.
- d. Recognize comparison and contrast – substitution of phonemes word initially, word medially and word finally for creating minimal pairs.

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- e. Recognize the classificatory system – stating individual word meanings and opposite words, formation of words with jumbled letters.
- f. Inferencing from the two texts in L2.
- g. Taking steps to repair faulty comprehension – simplified tasks and comprehension through teacher-lead prompts.
- h. Linking an L2 text or part of the text to another text in L1. For example, proverbs, special texts and narratives.

For L1 most of the learners learn to read after applying the language orally for 4-5 years.

Simultaneously they are also using L2 for 1-2 years before reading L2 or at the same time of oral application. The background knowledge for the basic grammatical structures is more for L1.

Considering the learning situations for the two languages it is necessary to guide the learners in L2 the strategies that have been productive for them for L1. One of these is teaching reading and exposure to L2 print. In the process of learning L2, learners are likely to contrast with L1.

For instance, from the background knowledge of L1, they focus more on morphological complexity, grammatical information in suffixes. The letter-sound relationship is less regular in English than Bangla. The Orthographic Depth Hypothesis (ODH) (Koda 1999: 52) proposes that in a word's phonology, orthographic depth and amount of lexical involvement are directly related. The L2 learner from the very beginning becomes aware of the phonologically dissimilar and less regular orthography, acquired only through memorization and recognition. A knowledge base on L2 phonology is a necessity for the acquisition. This will raise the consciousness of dissimilarities and similarities with L1 phonology.

Language transfer influences

Grabe and Stoller, 2011, mention 'transfer' as an idea that second language learners use from their L1 to carry out tasks in L2. According to them, phonological knowledge, topical knowledge, problem solving strategies and inference skills can be transferred. For our context, these are:

1. Phonological knowledge – i.e., utterances of stops phonemes, being aware of features of affricates, concepts of diphthongs, suprasegmental phonemes, phoneme clusters, etc.
2. Topical knowledge – i.e., occurrence of grammatical concepts, sentence formation.
3. Problem solving strategies – i.e., recall and check, revise and repeat application of language forms in varied contexts.
4. Inference skills – i.e., differentiating implication and application of skills, develop on connecting background knowledge to oral and textual information.

All of the above are positive transfers, valuable for L2 development. When we compare L1 and L2 background knowledge, we can motivate learners; help them to grow interest and self esteem with L2. According to Grabe and Stoller, L1 and L2 reading abilities for advanced levels tend to merge and appear to be similar. Within the classroom context focusing of reading and writing gets priority over vocabulary building and semantics (semantic relationship between words and their contexts). It is expected that students would learn them on their own as they engage in classroom tasks and activities. Students need self esteem and motivation to learn a wide range of words which are usually not covered in the classroom. Reading texts other than learning materials is important for recognizing word meanings accurately. Kern's 1994 study, reveals that mental translation is a strategy for a weaker reader

for integrating and assimilating meaning in difficult texts. Meaningful texts without tight control over syntax and vocabulary facilitates incidental learning for children (Elley, 1991).

The interpersonal factors for first language choice in the second classroom are:

- a) Lining up with student orientation on a shared language. The sharing of language aligns students concerns, learning and learning appreciation. Students who did not understand have a further chance in comprehending the shared language.
- b) The first language use in the learning context aids in highlighting the unheard discourses in L2. Students listen carefully to the teacher-lead instruction and can decide on the immediate tasks in the classroom.

- c) Limiting the use of L1 after a certain stage in the learning process reinforces L2 as the subject of study and the only means of communication within the classroom context.

Thus, when a shared language has been used in the learning context, how much of the second language has been / can be acquired at the end of the primary level? How much of the second language learning do the children forget when they do not have the context of speaking or listening to the language? For these answers, effective pedagogy in the classroom is needed, which can be as the following: When they are taught in the natural acquisition setting, the learning may not happen. They are rarely corrected. There is no context of being surrounded by the language and proficient language users for many hours each day. In the traditional instructional setting, our learners learn faster. Errors are frequently corrected; the emphasis is on accuracy and not on getting the meaning across with limited ability. Learners are exposed to learning one item at a time with linguistic items practised in isolation. For the primary level they are not in contact with a wide variety of vocabulary and structures at the beginning and are in contact with the language for few hours in a week. They experience a limited range

of language discourse types with specific grammatical forms. Learners learn and perform under pressure to speak and write correct English. For the communicative instructional setting, which is used along with the traditional instructional setting in our learning context, the input is modified to the level of the learner to ensure comprehension. A variety of discourses are introduced through role plays and stories. The emphasis at the beginning is on structured comprehension of simple to complex. And gradually on production after the language is learnt to a certain extent from inputs. Children, learn language through speaking. Speech is the connection between word and object, action or idea. Listening is the only skill at the first stages of language learning. Listening introduces the pluri-segmental features and the sentence patterns to the learner.

Analysis of L1 texts

For L1, in standard 2, the text is Sahaj path - dwitiya bhag by Rabindranath Tagore. The first lesson introduces the last consonant (visarga) of the consonant phoneme series in a short reading text of 16 sentences. 15 words with the consonant with difficult pronunciation and spelling are included. The text is on a play. In the second text, the conjunct consonant (ya- phala) occurs. Twenty two words with the conjunct consonant appear in the 20 sentences of the reading text. Among these words, one is monosyllabic, 8 are disyllabic, 12 are trisyllabic and two are with four syllables. There is one to one grapheme phoneme matching in the varied spellings for those words. The text is on a meeting for an occasion.

For the third lesson, there is a short poem (hāt) depicting the activities at the market, the people and the selling and buying of commodities, and pictures from the river and the road. The sentences are mostly of four words, the last word rhymed with the next line. The meaning is complete in each two lines. There are 11 such pairs.

The fourth lesson is a short text with another two conjunct consonant /nga/ (uaye- ga) and /kh- khiya/ (khiya). There are known words with and their spellings. Ten words are with the first conjunct and three with the second (khiya). The text is of 13 lines and is on locusts and environment. The fifth lesson includes introduces two new conjuncts and revises on a previous lesson's conjunct. These conjuncts are /nda/, /ndha/, and /nga/. The text is on arrangements prior to two individuals visit and during the visit. The sixth lesson is on introduction to /r/ (reph), which occurs as a conjunct consonant in form of a suprasegmental and its pronunciation in contexts. It occurs only in word medial and word final positions. The text is on the neighbourhood in the monsoons. After a short text of 16 sentences, the lesson presents a poem on a forest hut, animals in a forest and their activities with the narrator. It is of 36 lines, with two – four words per line. Two conjunct consonants (hasanta, chandra bindu or suprasegmental nasal) are introduced. The seventh lesson is on /ra-phala/, a conjunct occurring in combination with 6 different consonants. These are /s, ʃ, j, t, gha, g/. The text also includes a consonant cluster /nta/, in word medial and word final contexts. The eighth lesson is on the conjunct /sta, stha/. The text is of 13 lines. Other consonant clusters in the text are /kla/, /nta/, /tra/. The text is on marketing food items and their amounts to be purchased and arrangements for cooking on the way. The emphasis is on orthography and pronunciation. The ninth lesson is on the morning schedules of an employee. The 14 sentences text introduces consonant clusters /spa, ʃca, nka /

The tenth lesson is on consonant clusters / şta, nja, spa, ştha/ the text is on a visit of a folk singer at a dwelling on a rainy day. /şta/ occurs in word finally and for inflected words medially, while the rest are in word medial position. The text is followed by a nature poem of 24 lines.

The next lesson is on geminates /kk, thth, ll, nn, jj, tt/, which occur as conjunct consonants. The 34 sentences text is ornamented by reduplicated syllables in onomatopoeic words and echo words. Other clusters in the text are/ cch, şb, jjb, nc, sk, nñh, nñ, nd, nd/. The text is on home incidents at night. The text is followed by a 18-line poem on early morning.

The eleventh lesson is a story on tiger hunting. The text introduces the clusters /kt, st, kl, ndr, mb, sk, sb/ and conjuncts /kr, sr, pr, ru, ghr, dr/. This is followed by a poem on a dream. The next lesson is on a travel story of a doctor to a far away visit on a palanquin. It is on the travel experience through a forest. The last lesson is on a story of a poor father arranging for his daughter's wedding and the incidents. The story has a happy ending.

The entire text focuses on the consonant phonemes and orthographic recognition of new and old words learnt during the lesson. The short stories and poems are activities on reading and vocabulary. This also includes listening activities, learning by heart/ memorizing, and acquiring accurate pronunciation. By the time the learners are beginning their L2 acquisition, they have in-depth knowledge on the above L1 features. Thus in a similar fashion, this background knowledge can be used to some extent for acquiring L2 features. For the detailed orthographic peculiarities of L2, wherein there is no one-to-one matching between grapheme and phoneme, learners can be motivated to learn referring to the ways they had adopted for learning L1.

Sukumar Ray in *Abol Tabol* had experimented with L1 words. In ‘*khichuri*’ (Stew Munch), there is blending of 6 animals into 3 names. These are duck and hedgehog ‘*hasjaru*’, swan and tortoise ‘*bakkochrop*’, and elephant and sea whale ‘*hatimi*’. Besides these, combination of 10 other animals into 5 blending is mentioned in the poem. In the poem ‘*ābal tābal*’ (Nonsense), Ray had coined a. new words such as; soft shadow of the rainbow - ‘*rāmdhanuker ābchāyā*’, voice – ‘*kanṭho pur*’ b. new concepts; ringing of bells from the smell of light covered in darkness (*ālaye ḍhaka andhakār ghaṇṭa bāje gandhe tār*), the dew of the moon from the ancient times (*ādim kāler cāndim him*). The poem is about a dream, its context, its music, its words, with a thought provoking line on word-cutter, cutting the twist created by words (*kathāye kāṭe kathār pānch*).

From these two poems, the L1 learner can have inputs in creativity and on cognitive activities in playing with language in rendering word meaning and expressing ideas. This background knowledge can be utilized in the L2 learning.

Conclusion

Focusing on modified instruction in L2, the article has discussed on structured inputs which can draw on the learner’s attention with its metalinguistic references to L1. A feature of second language acquisition in our context is structured and communicative instruction, where the learners had spent more time with L1 before beginning to learn L2. Thus the possible ways where background knowledge of L1 learning can be investigated for L2 acquisition has been focused. L2 learning in L1 background needs further research in terms of different instructional inputs and interaction.

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