Modern Research Studies

An International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

An Indexed & Refereed e-Journal

www.modernresearch.in

Title: Between Incidental and Intentional Vocabulary Learning: To Use or Not to Use Translations in the Second Language Classroom

Author/s: SHANTHI NADARAJAN
TEE MENG YEW
MOSES SAMUEL

Between Incidental and Intentional Vocabulary Learning: To Use or Not to Use Translations in the Second Language Classroom

SHANTHI NADARAJAN*
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
nshanthi@cls.unimas.my

TEE MENG YEW
University of Malaya
Mytee22@yahoo.com
&
MOSES SAMUEL
University of Malaya
mosess@um.edu.my

∗ Correspondence author

Abstract: Translations and translating practices no longer differentiate between native and non-native language teachers. While teachers and students may want to use only the new language for some parts of the lesson, beginners and intermediate learners may not always understand them and therefore translation has become an inevitable feature of bilingual teaching and a specific activity in itself. This national level study that comprises of primary data taken from video recordings of twelve teachers' classroom practices investigates how teachers intentionally teach words in the classroom. The purpose of the study is to compare movements between classroom practices across time and space and to theorize about the nature of practice within the Malaysian public school system. The case is made for the use of such studies so as to gain a bird's eye perspective of classroom practices in a national system as well as to lay the foundation for inter system comparisons.

Keywords: Vocabulary acquisition, second language acquisition, code switching, input process, incidental learning.

Introduction

The need to get L2/FL learners to learn words fast and move on to tasks has often given rise to concerns whether unfamiliar words need to be directly addressed or through rote learning in classrooms. In situations where intentional learning is perceived to be less conducive, the subject of how much credence should be given to learning vocabulary via context and through extensive reading serve as additional concerns since most learners need to learn the language in order to comprehend content knowledge. Nevertheless, given that incidental and intentional learning are widely encouraged in EFL classrooms (Coady 1997; Schmidt 1994) and there is a pre-existing preference among FL/L2 learners to memorize words prior to major examinations, this study is more concerned with intentional vocabulary instruction that is carried out through the target language and through direct translations and its effect on L2 learners' word use. The study is based on the assumption that if vocabulary acquisition can be achieved intentionally and contextually without instructors having to revert to the first language, the process may offer benefits to all learners, rather than to a select few. The study is also in line with S. Webb's suggestion that when vocabulary knowledge is learned through context, it provides "a better chance of gaining vocabulary knowledge than decontextualized learning from translation" (2007, 64). This issue is of relevance to classrooms which comprise of students from multiple language communities and L2/FL learners who happen to be largely beginners who need help with essential vocabulary in order to move on to tasks.

The role of L1 in Vocabulary Instruction

To assess how learners learn words in the classroom, there is a need to understand both the process of acquisition (sequence across time or proficiency) and outcome (i.e. the language produced at any one stage). Then again, recognizing the importance of instructional input would mean taking cognizance of the fact that there remains in the literature and among language teachers the belief that the primary language of instruction in the L2 classroom should be the target language (Levine

2003). However, as G. Cook (2010) points out, the motives for learning languages nowadays may not be the same as it was when the currently dominant ideas about language learning and teaching was initially formulated. This is because a lot has changed in language teaching and learning in the present era of electronic communication, mass migration, internalization and globalization, and it may no longer be relevant to continue viewing translation through the myopic lens of history where the target language was the only acceptable language for teaching languages. Of course, this is not to deny the possibility that when students are exposed to three to six hours of English lessons weekly and when input happens to be a mix of vernaculars (e.g. L1), there is the likelihood for some of the L1 and faulty grammar features to become a part of the learners' interlanguage. Besides, the communicative approach also states that the L2 needs to be the vehicle of instruction and primary language employed by students in their interactions. Nevertheless a number of L2 only proponents (Chaudron 1988; Dickson 1992; Ellis 1994) have broadened this position to emphasize on the importance of both the quality of L2 input and the use of activities to help input become intake. While opponents of the L2 only practice argue that "the sole use of L2 as the language of instruction appears to inhibit that process" because "it obstructs the rapid connection of words with thoughts", slows the acquisition of meaning in the L2 "by retarding acquisition of meaning and limits growth in concept development and cognitive language proficiency" (Skinner 1985, 383), some L2 researchers (e.g. Swain and Lapkin 2000) found the L1 to enable L2 students to negotiate meaning and communicate successfully in the target language and suggest that by disallowing the use of L1, the system literally denies L2 learners a valuable learning tool. The importance of L1 becomes more salient when viewed from the perspective of the interactionist learning theory which suggests that input alone may not be enough for language acquisition to take place; and to turn language input into intake and knowledge, the L2 learners do need to interact with other speakers to negotiate the meaning of the input (Long 1996) and produce output (Swain 1995). Other scholars (Atkinson 1987; Cook 2001; Macaro 1997) oppose the L2 only practice since the use of the L1 is seen as a natural practice in L2 learning process and at times more efficient

compared to using the L2 alone. Literature on 'code switching" further champions the use of L1 in the L2 classroom with Hall & Cook (2012) and Macaro (2014) arguing for the use of L1 as an effective means to achieve ends such as classroom management, modeling the bilingual speaker, explaining grammar points and for teaching new vocabulary to beginners and lower learners. Macaro also recognizes the need for a limit to the use of L1 in language instruction if instruction is aimed at communicative competence (2014). So, while it remains undeniable that academic understanding of language learning may be cumulative and polarized, it must be noted that each individual learner begins each task anew and there is no evidence that the present generation of language learners are getting better or worse than their predecessors (Cook 2010, xvii). Despite all these, ESL literature continues to favor the use of English as the medium of instruction raising concerns as to whether the widespread practice of using translations in L2 classrooms by instructors in multilingual classrooms contributes or retards vocabulary growth since inadequate vocabulary knowledge is said to cut across the interlanguage continuum of L2 learners and lack of meaningful input can restrict language development.

L1 use in South East Asia

Contrary to what is often assumed and recommended in mainstream literature English is taught through the medium of L1 or the majority language in many Asian classrooms. As Hallinger (2010) points out, this may not be due to lack of knowledge or teachers' overlooking the importance of comprehensible input, but due to a system that is constrained by instructor attitudes that learners find it easier to understand words or concepts through the L1. This study therefore explores some of the concerns related to vocabulary instruction, L1 use and translation practices in Malaysia. Malaysia is used as a representative sample of what is happening in other regions where learning the L2 remains a challenge. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of how vocabulary is being addressed in Malaysian schools, the following research questions were formulated:

- What is the level of translation and L1 use in Malaysian Form 1 classrooms?

- How do language teachers' translations and use of L1 help
  learners speak up in class?

The study aims to take off from the suggestion put forward in Liu et al.
(2014) that calls for research on L1 and L2 use to include more
recordings of individual teacher's classroom practices and the findings
to serve as baseline to explain what is happening in public schools.

The Study

This study is a part of a system level study initiated through the
IMCEP project aimed at identifying and describing the watermark of
classroom education practices in Malaysian public schools. Twelve
teachers from three East Malaysian public schools classroom discourse
were investigated from a pool of 24 randomly selected schools in
Malaysia for three consecutive lessons. The schools were selected from
a list of almost 2000 public secondary schools in Malaysia for this
study.[1] The broad based selected was aimed at providing a comparative
framework for understanding language teachers' intentional vocabulary
instruction. Video recordings were used as a form of observation to
provide lasting records and this made it possible to capture the rich
complexity of classroom practices.

Subjects

A total of twelve teachers (12x3= 36 lessons) volunteered to
participate in this study. All the teachers had a minimum degree in their
respective disciplines from local universities and were above average
L2 speakers and had taught the subject for more than two years. The L1
of the teachers were Malay. It was not possible to include either the
teachers' nor students' English proficiency level since we had no means
of measuring their levels objectively. The students in schools could be
considered intermediate since they had been learning English for almost
six years in their primary schools and were learning Mathematics, and
Science in English.

---

[1] Refer to Tee et al. (2016) for further details on the IMCEP Project's objective.

Minimum Vocabulary Input

There remains a concern in Malaysia (like a number of other South East Asian nations) that teachers function largely "as implementers of reforms without any contributions upwards to shape or decide" (Hallinger 2010, 405) and there is a need to verify this statement within the context of Malaysian classroom practices in order to make positive changes in future. Presently, the Malaysian Form one English syllabus specifies a list of 1000 high frequency vocabulary items for study for the year. At a more ambitious level the syllabus also suggests that language teachers use it to connect with what is being taught in other content subjects such as Science. An analysis of the wordlist based on the British National Corpus suggest most of the words to be set at the first and second one thousand general words of the English language (Refer Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of the words from the Form 1 Curriculum based on BNC Corpus

Level	1K	2K	3K	4K	5K	6K	7K	8K	9K	10K	11K
Token	542	286	59	49	20	7	3	1	1	0	1
%	55.48	29.27	6.04	5.02	2.05	0.72	0.31	0.1	0.1	0	0.1

A comparative re-analysis of the various subjects' vocabulary lists through the widely used vocabprofile via *Lextutor* (Refer Table 2) reveals that 51.3% from the first 1000 word list and 45.41 % from the second level of the 1000 word list account for 96.75% familiar words found in the text.

Table 2: Distribution of Vocabulary for the Form 1 in Syllabus according to Subjects

Level	1st. 1000 words (1K)		2nd. 1000 words (2K)	Academic words
		Function	Content	
English	51.3	6.53	44.80	45.41	0.41
Mathematics	46.21	3.28	42.93	13.38	12.37
Science	41.78	3.95	37.83	15.13	17.43

(Form 1: 14-15 year olds)

This is in line with existing theoretical views about sight word recognition needs. Knowledge of these words would help the learners guess and deduce meanings of age appropriate words on their own and communicate in the language.

Nature of Vocabulary input received in Malaysian Form 1 Classrooms

To obtain baseline data about the types of words and nature of vocabulary input received in Malaysian classrooms, four teachers' (e.g. English, Malay, Science and Mathematics) classroom interaction was analyzed. The four teachers came from a single school in East Malaysia. Only teachers who used English to teach were involved in the baseline study. The teachers happened to be senior teachers (approximately 45–55 years of age), well experienced in their subject matter and L2 users of English. Translation, if at all, was limited to foreign words introduced by learners, abstract concepts that required lengthy explanations or specialized terms. The Malay subject was included just to provide an indication of the general language used in the L1 situation. Table 3 provides the average number of new words introduced in a class in a single day across subjects. It was found that approximately 5-10 new words were introduced in each subject when English is used in class but not for Malay.

Table 3: Frequency of Vocabulary instruction in a Form 1 class in a Single Day

	BM- 300614	BI- 260614	SC-300614	Mat- 270614
	Malay	English	Science	Mathematics
No of words				
Explicit Instruction	0	4	3	3
Contextual Instruction	11	6	4	2
Translation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

All three L2 teachers used a single expression or phrase to explain unfamiliar word meaning as it arose during instruction and this was generally followed up with a contextual clue or elaboration except for one language instructor who translated a Malay expression uttered by the student to English to help students infer meanings efficiently (Refer Table 4). The subject teachers infused more lexical variation and sophistication during instruction compared to language teachers but there was minimal interaction in the content classrooms since the teachers were very much in control of the lessons from start to finish. There was a rush to cover as much content as possible.

Table 4: Differences in nature of vocabulary input across subjects in a single day.

Vocabulary instruction	English (Lexical depth)	Mathematics (Word Association)	Science (Lexical variation)
Single word /phrase meaning	Tr: …what about **unkind**? ….**unkind** is like when you do something cruel.	Tr: …Do you know what you call an angle that is less than 90 degrees? It is called an **acute angle**.	Tr: .. what is **sand**? **Sand** is a compound…. I have got **sand** and salt. I mix it.
Context elaboration	Tr: If you are **unkind**, you won't be helping … we do have Malaysians who are **unkind** and selfish. Can you give me an example?	Tr: .. Ok. This fan **represents an angle**. For here we **adjust the angle** to **get either a small angle** or a bigger angle. There are a **variety of angles** and … we learn how to **measure angles** and **what is used to measure angles**.	Tr: Alright class, today we will **filter** salt and sand through **filtration**. This is a **filter** paper and that is a **filter** funnel. The thing that is on the **filter** is called a **filtrate**. What did you **filtrate**? Ss: Salt solution. .. Tr: … there are 2 processes involved in separating sand and salt. The first is **filtration**.
Input (Repetition)	**unkind** is repeated 7X in the lesson)	(Note: The word **angle** is associated with another term at least 14 X in the lesson)	(Note: The word **sand** is repeated 8X in the lesson The variations for **filter** occur 8X)
Output (Student)	Context - 1 (Conversational English)	Single word/phrase – 7	Hands on practice and report writing. No interaction.

The popular vocabulary learning strategies among the teachers were guessing from context, keyword technique, translating and elaborating in context. The various strategies were in line with existing practices in L2 vocabulary studies (e.g. Ellis & He 1999); Nation 2006). The teachers did not choose to translate except when a word from the mother tongue was used by learners. It was assumed that this could be due to Hawthorne effect. There is the possibility that with a different set of less experienced instructors the scenario might have been different. The data for the school involved in the baseline data was removed from

the subsequent research findings since the aim of the study was to analyze the effect of translation in vocabulary instruction.

Data Analysis

The study used primarily qualitative data for describing the detailed language practices in the classroom and will attempt to explain both language use and classroom instructional practice. Each instructor's lesson was video-taped for three consecutive sessions. The data involved 1000 minutes of classroom interaction. The quality of the video-taping was good and all the taped lessons were transcribed in English or Malay but the Malay utterances were followed up with an English translation placed in brackets and are italicized. The video-taped sessions of each teacher were viewed and interactions transcribed. Instances when a vocabulary was noted by the instructor (e.g. through a specific wh- and explained by the instructor) were seen as intentional vocabulary instruction. The use of the same word was traced to determine the various techniques intentionally used to help learners understand word meaning in depth. Two weeks later, the transcripts were reanalyzed with the team to determine if the various words were addressed intentionally or in context. Special attention was given to translated words to see if such words did indeed help reinforce word knowledge and word use. The teachers used more English in their daily interactions than the amount believed to be typical of Malaysian class and by the same token, the translation practices were perhaps not as realistic since some teachers made conscious efforts to speak and reprimand in English and often rephrased their translated outburst into English immediately. Despite the effect of the observer's paradox, an insight into both the patterns of classroom activities and instructional patterns remains valuable as it sheds light into a less reported area in classroom practice.

Results and Discussion

For this section of the study nine teachers between the ages of 25 to 35 years from a single school were involved. The teachers were from East Malaysia and spoke a number of regional languages. The recordings were clear and description of the teachers' translation and vocabulary teaching strategies that followed should therefore be viewed

as efforts to raise issues about the vocabulary instructional practices in schools rather than serve as criticisms of teacher practices.

Nature of vocabulary input received in Malaysian Form 1 classrooms that used translations and L1

In terms of calculating the amount of L1 and L2 used, we chose to count the English and Malay words, respectively based on every word uttered by both teachers and learners (where audible) based on Liu et al. (2004) and Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie's (2002) design on L1 and L2 use in classrooms. Then the proportions of English and Malay in the total number of words used for each class were computed and the percentages calculated. Such a method was viewed as simple and efficient but could have distorted some meaning due to some senses and meanings being lost in the process. Similar to Liu et al. (2004), the proportion of words in this study should not be interpreted to mean the proportion of time in speaking English or in the L1 (e.g. Malay) since a teacher may be spending less time using the L1 or more time waiting for students to think and respond in the L2 and vice versa. After examining the teachers' instructional practices, we classified their classroom interaction into eight functions: greetings, giving directions/instructions, questions to check understanding of word meaning, direct explanations of meanings, explanation of meanings in context, managing students and making personal comments and jokes. Then we counted the number of words used for each function in the L2 environment. Table 5 reports the amount of English and Malay used as a percentage of the total number of words spoken across subjects. The amount of Malay or translation used was calculated by subtracting the percentage of English spoken from 100% similar to Liu et al. (2004). Table 5 also reports relevant statistics from the students' responses to intentional word instruction and students' interaction in terms of non-vocabulary related word use (e.g. responding to grammar questions, providing answers, comments).

L1 and Translations used to teach word meanings

The amount of L1 used in the recorded lessons varied from zero to 99% based on lesson and subject. While most L2 teachers did not seem to use much L1 to teach, there was plenty of ad hoc translations and

movement back and forward between the L1 and L2, with science teachers in particular reading from the text in the L2 and switching to the L1 to explain, elaborate and instruct. There were lessons in which the teacher explicitly translated word for word as in excerpt 1.So, while the use of L1 did create a sense of confidence for the learners in what they know, learn and the order in which they were leaning, there was also a lack in monolingual teaching where the teacher probably understood what was happening but the students clearly could not see the whole picture and suffered from a disconcerting sense of disorientation and loss of control in terms of what would be happening. This finding concurs with Duff and Polio's (1990), and Liu et al.'s (2004) studies which suggest teachers' use of the L1 to range from 10% to 90% with an average of 60%. The fact that many of the earlier studies looked at L1 use from an EFL context and percentage seem to concur suggest that a number of Malaysian language classrooms may be closely similar to EFL context rather than ESL context. Table 5 summarizes the percentage of word use according to functions and will focus on approaches related to vocabulary instruction: a) questioning to check a word meaning, b) providing a direct meaning in either L1 or L2, explaining difficult vocabulary through form focused activities, giving background information and c) getting students to use the word well on their own. The English equivalents to the translations are italicized and indicated in parenthesis. The original L1 words have been translated into English for ease of understanding and italicized in excerpt 1. The target word is underlined. The science teacher is teaching about the Composition of air

Excerpt 1: Sc-T40-L3

> Tr: *Alright it increase a bit. The effect on the glowing splinter.*
> Tr: *the splinter … burns. The splinter glows*.
> SS: *glows*
> Tr: *Does anyone want me to translate in English*.
> SS (Chorus): No
> SS1: *Teacher. I want. I want the word in English*.
> Tr: Ok. In English it is <u>ignite.</u>
> SS2: *night teacher.*
> SS3: it… night.
> Tr: Ignite
> SS4: shut off
> Tr: Maybe you can write light up.

SS1: not night yet.
SS2: Extinguished.
SS1: night or in night?
Tr: Just copy down.

This is not to deny, however that the ways content teachers teach new words and terms in their subjects are significantly different from those of language teachers. The differences however cuts both ways and can bring advantages and disadvantages. The science teachers' uses of academic words were usually accompanied by experiential learning where students could actualize the meaning of difficult concepts through experiments and group learning activities. Such words were often repeated to reinforce the idea. On the other hand, students may have fewer barriers to certain kinds of new knowledge and for instance merely need the translated word to reinforce understanding as in excerpt 2.The mathematics teacher is explaining profit and loss.
Excerpt 2: Mat T36-L3

> Tr: *the drop gets less and less.* Do you know what is profit? The amount of increase… *how much is the increase*? … to be divided by the original price. Let's say the last time it was ten ringgit and now it is 20 Ringgit. Divide by original. … Who wants to try? Find the value. *Who wants to try*. *This is how we do it. This way….*

Here, the learner may find it easy to comprehend the concept and appear less inhibited by stress, self-consciousness and worry about the final outcomes since the teacher is providing the answer; but the same qualities of word use, translation and spontaneity may hinder the learner in other ways since the learner is less likely to work hard on thinking about the word.

Table 5: **Percentage of L2 and L1 used in Malaysian Form 1 Classrooms across subjects**

Subject	Greeting a		Directions/ Instructions b		Quest. to check word meaning c		Explanation of word meanings d		Explanation in context e		Sub Total (c+ d +e) %	General Reading F		Manage students g		Personal comments h		SS. Responses i		*Ss. Interaction j	
	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M		E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M
English (%)	0.7		29.5	0.9	11.8	0.3	9.7	0.3	10.8	1.2	34.2	5.0	0.0	12.1	0.6	2.1	0.4	6.5	1.6	6.4	0.7
Science (%)	0.40	0.5	0	60.92	0	0.7	0	0	1.9	10.2	12.8	0	3.8	0	11.8	0	0	0	0	1.52	8.17
Maths (%)	0	0	60	1	0	0	10.2	0	11.18	1	35.18	0	0	0	6.96	9.93	0	0	0	0.2	0
SD	1.2		12.5	3.3	11.1	0.7	5.6	0.7	7.4	2.9	14.8	4.6	0.0	8.9	2.1	1.9	0.9	4.4	2.8	6.1	1.2

E- English   M- Malay

*The percentage reported here represents the language used by students when responding, asking and commenting in class

The effect of language teachers translations and use of L1 in helping learners speak up

Translation as seen from classroom interaction can be interpreted in a very loose sense to mean all types of mediation between different language users. By definition it opens the doorway for learners to use a number of home languages depending on the teacher's ability to understand and explain it to the learner. Alternatively, translation can be seen more strictly as: "the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in the L1" (Catford 1964, 20) which teachers appear to use selectively as in excerpt 3 and 4. English equivalents to the translations are italicized and indicated in parenthesis. The original L1 word is left in bold for excerpt 3. The target word is underlined.

Situation: The excerpt begins with the teacher asking for the meaning of the word 'patient'.

Excerpt 3- Teacher 5 – Form Focused Instruction

Tr :	What is <u>patient</u>?
SS5:	**sakit** *(pain)*
Tr:	No…What is patience?
SS6:	**sabar** (as in uncomplaining)
Tr:	Patient … Passion …Patience

(Students begin speaking in chorus)
(Teacher writes on the board).

Tr:	Three words that sound familiar. ..<u>patient</u> – passion - patience.

(Taps on board. Students begin reading)

Tr:	The 1st. word is <u>patient</u> – **pesakit** (a *sick person)*, Passion …?
Ss5:	berjaya (success)
Tr:	No! **semangat berjaya** (*The spirit of success*). Excited. **Semangat untuk pasukan bola sepak.** (*The desire to succeed for the football team*). Patience- **kesabaran** – (*uncomplaining*) <u>Patient</u> is tolerate. Patience is tolerance. Patient is the noun and patience is the verb. Now, can you add five more words for 13 -20?

In excerpt 3 the teacher prompts in the L2 by providing the noun 'patience' to help differentiate the contextual difference. The learners respond in L1 but inaccurately. The teacher introduces three additional similar sounding nouns to help raise awareness and to help learners attend to meaning. The teacher encourages the learner to articulate the words to help reinforce the sound and stress. The teacher repeats each

word in the L1 and provides a direct translation, followed by a phrase, and when the three words have been explained, the teacher reinforces the meaning by teaching the form and goes on to provide a context. The fact that the teacher mentioned a wrong part of speech did not seem to matter at this juncture. Teachers also seem to use translations based on the level of student motivation in classes. Excerpts 4 and 5 depict the teacher teaching the meaning of the word 'club' in two different classes. The words in L1 have been translated and appear in italics.

Excerpt 4 –Teacher 5 Explicit Instruction – Refuting and Reinforcement of meaning

Tr:	What is a <u>club</u>? <u>Club</u> is from which sentence
	Teacher Reads aloud.
	Bob grabs a <u>club</u> and sits in a tub…have you ever heard the word <u>club</u>? … What is the meaning of the word <u>club</u>? You have not heard
Ss	of the word <u>club</u>.
Tr	*Science and mathematics <u>club</u>.*
	That means a certain organization. Sentence 4 does not mean an organization. <u>Club</u> is something like a baseball bat. Society… that is like a Science and Mathematics society. Any sort of strong wood. Bob grabs a club and sits in a tub.

By allowing the students to speak in L1, the teacher is able to detect the gap in the learners' interlanguage. This enables the teacher to provide immediate error correction, and elaborate and reinforce meaning. Excerpt 5 is explicit instruction involving the same teacher, but in another class with a less proficient set of students. The L1 words are italicized.

Excerpt 5 – Teacher 5- Simplification of meaning

Tr:	Club. What is a <u>club</u>?
	(On noticing that the students are not speaking up)
	What is a <u>club</u>? What is …a baseball bat. A stick that looks like a baseball bat. So maybe in this sentence. Bob grabs a <u>club</u> and sits in a tub. He took a stick and went into the lavatory. So what is a
Ss	*<u>club</u> in this situation?*
Tr	*:Stick*
	:A stick that looks like a baseball bat.

Most teachers switch from L2 to L1 when they realize that learners are unable to explain in the L2. L1 is therefore a coping strategy. Excerpt 6 provides evidence for a teacher trying to help students

understand an adjective and an unfamiliar concept. Though the students knew the answer in L1, the teacher translates for the benefit of the rest of the class and this appears to lower the affective filter for others in class who decide to speak up.

Excerpt 6 – Teacher 6 – Negotiation of Meaning

Tr:	… dashing . What does <u>dashing</u> mean?
SS1:	Handsome
Tr:	(*Good looking*). A <u>dashing</u> duke means a duke who is good looking. … Do you know what is a <u>duke</u>?
Ss1:	No…
Tr:	A <u>duke</u> is a guy or man with a certain…
Ss2	*King…?*
Tr:	No not a king
Ss3:	*Follower maybe …*
Tr:	No… he is a person with a position. He has royal blood. *From a noble line* but not the king.
Ss:	Oh (Chorus)
Tr:	Do you have anyone in the Malay custom with royal blood but not
Ss:	the king?
Tr:	Yes (Chorus)
Ss2:	So, what you call …
Tr:	*Prince* (Chorus) Prince but sometimes <u>duke …</u> are not prince. Of a royal line but the context is not correct here. Lets' move on.

The teacher appeared to code switch according to learner's level of comprehension. Though the interaction did not seem to help the learners arrive at the correct meaning, it helped learners interact. The use of L1 allows greater freedom for learners to speak up in class. The findings concur with previous studies (e.g. Kharma & Hajja 1989) which have also found such use of L1. However, it is also possible to state that the learners might have learnt more if they had been taught in a perfectly monolingual setting with the use of illustrations given that some attention and effort spent on learning vocabulary can help internalize the word in the learner's memory.

The Impact of Translation on Students Vocabulary Learning Ability

To determine the impact of the teachers' instructional language use on the students language use, we looked closely at what language the students used in their in class presentations at the end of a double

period. We classified their responses into 5 categories according to Liu et al. (2004) based on what was prevalent from the transcriptions.

- TE-SE1- Teacher used English and students responded in English
- TE- SE2- Teacher used L1 and told students to respond in English
- TM- SM – Teacher used L1 and students responded in Malay
- TM-SE2 – Teacher used L1 and student responded in L2
- SE1-SE2 – students respond to other students L2 use in L2

Table 6 shows the frequency of each type. Only responses made without the teacher specifying which language to use was assessed. Students' responses that merely contained a single utterance e.g. 'Yes' or 'No' were omitted. The frequency number suggests that the students responded using the same language as the teacher and the level of responses in English was only evident for classes where the teacher used only English or minimized the use of L1. In classes where both languages were used explicitly or tolerated, the response was often in L1.

Table 6: **Frequency of Student Response by Category**

Teacher	Lesson	TE-SE1	TE- SE2	TM- SM	TM-SE2	SE1-SE2
1	1	39	3	1		2
	2	26	1			1
	3	37			1	3
2	1	7	3			
	2	2	2			
	3	9				
3	1	0				
	2	0				
	3	0				
4	1	17			2	1
	2	1				4
	3	2				3
5	1		3	3		
	2	2	3	5		
	3		2	3		

The number of student's responses and comments varied considerably from class to class because of content, context and learner ability.

The following excerpt shows example of students responding to teachers in class. Excerpt 7 demonstrates the language used by a group of students required to present a menu with a healthy diet.

Excerpt 7 – Confident User of language
Teacher used English and Students responded in English

Tr1:	Do you think you are offering a healthy menu to your customers?
SS:	No. Student laughs.*(it is just a name)*
T:	… okay Natalia, what is the healthy food in your menu?
SS:	… for starters we have Zombie soup.
Tr1:	Zombie soup. What is it made from?
SS:	Vegetables.
Tr1:	Okay.
SS:	Then we have Dead man's steak?
Tr1:	Wow…. Dead man's steak. Is it real?
SS:	Of course not. Its' just beef steak with chili sauce.

The above student clearly possesses sufficient vocabulary to use words and expressions confidently. Yet, the student found the need to speak in her mother tongue as an aside. The teacher however did not encourage the learner to use L1 and this indirectly helped the learners speak up as indicated in excerpt 7. The use of L2 was helpful for this set of learners since this motivated the student to use word found beyond the textbooks. The use of the less frequent words was also useful for the classroom environment as it would have helped the passive and limited learners to benefit from the input.

These classroom exchanges in excerpts 1-7 demonstrate that spontaneity of students' responses is dependent on the level of difficulty of the questions and learner motivation. Given that most of the vocabulary questions in this study were largely simple words and the meanings could be retrieved from declarative memory, there is a greater chance that learners would have been able to activate their memories if given sufficient time or learnt in context. In fact, many of the answers to the words posed in the observation session revealed that teachers were asking questions to answers which the students already knew. So, this raised the question of Liu et al. (2004), if teachers use the L1 to scaffold weaker students over their language threshold or because

teachers themselves have difficulty in expressing their ideas in English. The next section will discuss this question.

Discussion

It was evident from the study that the teachers knew what was best for their learners. Nevertheless, the context of communicative learning needs to be seen in relation to studies that have cited the lack of language proficiency as having forced language teachers to revert to L1 as a coping mechanism to reinforce ideas which they feel have not come across strongly. This is in line with Anglin's (1993) morphological problem solving approach and Sinclair's idiom principle that suggest that different forms behave in different associations and teachers need to expose students to such features. Throughout the study the learners were also not able to display morphological analysis procedures despite select teachers using the various derivations because the teachers themselves did not seem very confident over the use of such terms and did not provide additional examples to reinforce understanding. They were not able to show a systematic pattern for learning of forms to help learners notice and attend to word forms. As such there is a possibility that SLA theoretical insights about form focused instruction may not be the default practice in Malaysian classrooms. This finding warrants further investigation for other similar settings in the region.

There is concern that translation can contribute to transfer and interferences such as 'word for wordism' with learners actually producing instances of grammatically incorrect language in L2. This also means privileging the lexical and syntactic levels, and translating each word in the same order as it occurs in the original and disregarding all other contextual clues. The teachers in the study were very fond of explaining words as isolate units rather than as chunk of words. Greater emphasis was laid on intentional vocabulary instruction with close to 15 to 55 percent of the lesson being devoted to teaching word meanings as isolated word meanings. There was little effort made to teach other skills. There is a need for more balanced language lessons that provide for learning across the four strands namely meaning focused input (listening and reading), language focused learning (involving the direct

study and teaching of vocabulary), meaning focused output (speaking and writing) and fluency development in order for L2 development in Malaysian Form 1 classrooms.

Each teacher translated a taught word 4 to 5 times. While it remains unclear whether such practices helped students to retain and consolidate meanings, scholars (e.g. Cameron 2001; Harbord 1992) argue that although the various kinds of vocabulary and concept are clearly related, they develop in different ways for each group of learners irrespective of learner ability and attention to a single word meaning in L1 or L2 may not help learner see that words take on meaning based on the words they associate with unless the explicit word meaning is followed up with a sentence or phrase to depict the words its associates with and meaning that follows (e.g. Excerpt 1). So, while translating words in classes fostered more efficient learning, outcomes may be subjective and warrants further investigation since some of the vocabulary instructions were mere recall sessions. Efforts to reinforce, expand and use words meaningfully were scarce and intermittent. Evidences for elaboration and morphological problem solving where the learner begins with a vague understanding of the meaning and the teacher helps the leaner unpack unfamiliar words using morphological analysis procedures or goes on a garden path to help reinforce understanding were limited.

Conclusion

It can be argued that there is little point in making recommendations about how to teach or learn words and get learners to use them in L1 and L2, and however many linguistic and psychological evidence there may be; unless teachers see them as relevant and pedagogically appropriate. So, if there is no case for using translations or L1 in some classes since the learners differ, then there is little point in pursuing the discussion further, other than perceive this as an academic exercise. However, when the evident points that the majority of teachers teach vocabulary and use translations in ways that interrupt the development of language learning, then ELT literature needs to be more specific about the kinds of translation that can be used and the circumstance by which teachers and the type of students who need it. Question of what,

what, what, why translations can and cannot be used in L2 cannot be kept neatly separate but be moved backwards and forwards. There is the need to recognize teachers who use translations and use them well to teach their learners in L2 classroom and if the benefits of translations are to be recognized, then new materials will need to be written, new tests designed and new elements be introduced into teacher education.

References:

Anglin, J. M. 1993. Vocabulary development: a morphological analysis. *Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development*. Cambridge University Press

Atkinson, D. 1987. "The mother tongue in the classroom: A neglected resource?" *ELT Journal*, *41.4*: 241-247.

Cameron, L. 2001. *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Web. Accessed May 15, 2016. http://cambridge.org/9780521774345

Catford, J. C. 1964. "The teaching of English as a foreign language." In *The Teaching of English*, edited by R. Quirk & A. H. Smith, 137-159. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chaudron, C. 1988. *Second language classrooms: Research on teaching and learning*. New York: Cambridge University

Coady, J. 1997. "L2 vocabulary acquisition: A synthesis of the research." In *Second language vocabulary acquisition,* edited by J. Coady & T. Huckin, 273-290. Cambridge: CUP.

Cook, V. 2001. "Using first language in the classroom." *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 57.3: 402-423.

Cook, G. 2010. *Translation in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dickson, P. 1992. *Using the target language in modern foreign language classrooms*. Slough, England: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Duff, P.A., & C.C. Polio. 1990. "How much foreign language is there in the foreign language classroom?" *Modern Language Journal*, *74.2*: 154-166.

Ellis, R. ed. 1994. *Implicit and explicit learning of languages*. London: Academic Press.

Ellis, R. and C. He. 1999. "The roles of modified input and output in the incidental acquisition of word meanings." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 21.2: 285-301.

Hall, G. & Cook, G. 2012. "Own language use in language teaching and learning." *Language Teaching,* 45.3: 271-308

Hallinger, P. 2010. "Making education reform happen: is there an "Asian" way?" *School Leadership and Management: Formerly School Organization*, *30.5*: 401-418.

Harbord, J. 1992. "The use of the mother tongue in the classroom." *ELT Journal*, 46.4: 350-355.

Kharma, N.N., & A.H. Hajjaj. 1989. "Use of the mother tongue in the ESL classroom." *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 27.3: 223-235.

Levine, G. 2003. "Student and instructors beliefs and attitudes about target language use, first language use, and anxiety: Report of a questionnaire study." *The Modern Language Journal, 87.3*: 343–364.

Liu, D., Gil-Soon Ahn, Kyung-Suk Baek & Nan-Ok Han. 2004. "South Korean High School English Teachers' Code Switching: Questions and Challenges in the Drive for Maximal Use of English in Teaching." *TESOL Quarterly, 38.4*: 605-638.

Long, M. 1996. "The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition." In *Handbook of second language acquisition, Vol.2.* edited by W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia, 413-468. San Diego, CA: Academic.

Macaro, E. 1997. *Target language, collaborative learning and autonomy*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Macaro. E. 2014. "Students' strategies in response to teachers' second language explanations of lexical items." *Language learning journal,* 1-16. DOI:10.1080/09571736.2014.905971

Nation, I. S. P. 2006. "How large a vocabulary is needed for reading and listening?" *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *63.1:* 59-82.

Rolin-Ianziti, J., & S. Bronlie. 2002. "Teacher use of the learners' native language in the foreign language classroom." *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58.3: 402-426.

Schmitt, N. 1997. "Vocabulary learning strategies." In *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy,* edited by N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy, 199-227. Cambridge: CUP.

Skinner, D. 1985. "Access to meaning: The anatomy of the language/ learning connection." *Journal of multilingual and multicultural development, 6.5:* 369-388.
DOI: 10.1080/01434632.1985.9994212

Swain, M. 1995. "Three functions of output in second language learning.' In *Principles and practice in applied linguistics*: *Studies in honour of H. G. Widdowson*, edited by G. Gook & B. Seidlhofer, 125-144. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. 2000. "Task based second language learning: The uses of the first language." *Language Teaching Research*, *4.3*: 251-274.

Tee, M.Y., M. Samuel, M.N. Norjoharuddeedn, & S. Nadarajan. 2016. "A methodological approach for researching national classroom

practices." *Journal of International and Comparative Education, 5.1*: 1-17.

Webb, S. 2007. "The effects of repetition on vocabulary knowledge." *Applied Linguistics*, *28.1*: 46-65