Uses of Multilingualism in Language Education: An Unfolding Story

Constant Leung
Boy
Girl
Apple
House
Book

Hello

Hola
Shifting Perspectives & Values

20th century ELT – intellectually influenced by a predominantly monolingual paradigm

Against the backdrop of:
• rejection of grammar translation
• wide acceptance of Direct Method

Supported by nationalism in some places, e.g. ‘English-only’ in US, e.g. Proposition 227
Communicative Language Teaching

Monolithic native speakerness.

A constant refrain

One-way conceptual travel

e.g. ‘... not all the grammatical inaccuracies a second language learner makes are necessarily those that a native speaker of the second language is likely to overlook ...’ (Canale & Swain, 1980: 11)

‘Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.’ (CEFR, 2001:24 - B2 Global Scale)

From reference to norm to orthodoxy!
Changing pedagogic discourses: Interest in embracing students’ *brought-along* languages
Dodson (1986:3)

DURING and immediately after the 1939-1945 war a large number of interpreters and linguists was required by the Armed Forces. The normal procedure of recruitment was to admit modern-language graduates and others who had learnt the language, either as a first or as a second language, in the foreign country in pre-war days. It was found, however, that members of both groups could not be employed immediately as interpreters because either their knowledge of the foreign language had deteriorated during their absence from the linguistic environment or, if they were fluent in two languages, they were unable to switch rapidly and accurately from one language system to the other. This latter skill is basic in the making of a good interpreter.

It was, therefore, necessary for these recruits to undergo intensive interpreter courses. As a first step, fluent native speakers of the foreign language (FL) were put through what are now called “interpretation exercises” to help them gain the skill of rapidly switching from one language to the other. In these exercises the oral stimulus is given in one language and the pupil’s response must be made immediately in the other. It is in fact a replica of the kind of work expected from a fully-trained interpreter in the field.

The Bilingual Method
Same principles applied to language learners
Can you tell me what we did?

Recall

Remember the experiment we did the other day with the paper cup and towel?

Can you tell me what we did? Recall

Reformulation, consolidation

New Concurrent Approach: Code-switching with purpose

Bilingual education
Separating languages:
• Content
• Person
• Time
• Space
Concurrent:
• New concurrent approach
• Preview-review
• Flip-flop
• Concurrent translation

T: Do you remember what we have been learning about air? What have we learned about air and weight?
S1: ...that air has weight.
T: Very good. And what have we learned about air and space?
S2: ...that air takes up space.
T: Very good. ¿Se recuerdan del experimento que hicimos el otro día con el vaso y la toallita de papel? ¿Me pueden decir lo que hicimos?
S3: Pusimos una toallita encima de un vaso y no se mojó el papel.
T: Muy bien. Who can tell me now why the paper didn’t get wet?
S4: ...because the air in the cup didn’t let the water into the napkin.
T: Muy bien. ¡Tú sí pusiste atención. El papel no se mojó porque el aire ocupa espacio y no permite que entre el agua.

New Concurrent Approach: Code-switching with purpose
Other voices

Cummins (1984-)

[Diagram of Cummins' Iceberg Model of Language Interdependence]
Lewis, Jones & Baker (2012:655)

‘In the classroom, translanguaging tries to draw on all the linguistic resources of the child to maximise understanding and achievement. Thus, both languages are used in a dynamic and functionally integrated manner to organise and mediate mental processes in understanding, speaking, literacy, and, not least, learning.’
In practice

Complete monolingual L2 classroom communication is rare e.g. French-immersion in Canada:

- ‘The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum;
- Overt support exists for the L1;
- The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community;
- Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency;
- Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom;
- The teachers are bilingual [accepting L1 in classroom];
- The program aims for additive bilingualism.’ (Swain, 2000: 200)
In practice

A study of 4 teachers in Japan – sidestepping communicative activities:

The textbooks included activities designed to encourage exploration and discussion of various cultural contexts where English might be used ... The teachers often explained these topics at length in Japanese, because ‘it’s quite difficult for them [students] to understand’ (Chikara). Moreover, they stated that they often struggled to translate unfamiliar concepts and offer information about overseas locations and international travel. Akira asserted that the contexts were irrelevant to the students’ everyday lives. He was at a loss to explain this cultural content and omitted many activities.’ (Humphries & Burns, 2015:243, emphasis added)
In practice - 4 classrooms in Hong Kong
(Lin, 1999, also see Leung, 2005)

Classroom A:
a Form 3 (third year in secondary school) class of 33 girls. The teacher appeared to be fluent in English and seemed to be at ease with everyday use as well as with using English for teaching purposes. The students seemed to be comfortable with English. The use of English as a medium for classroom teaching and interaction appeared to be working well, both in whole class talk and group discussion.

Classroom B:
a Form 2 class (second year in secondary school) of 42 students (boys and girls). The teacher seemed to speak in English only. The students did not seem to be cooperative in class and tended to speak in Cantonese except when being told to do a specific task in English. The school is located in a government subsidised housing estate. The students are reported to speak only Cantonese at home.

Classroom C:
a Form 2 class of 39 students (boys and girls). The students had limited English proficiency for their grade level. The teacher would ask task-related questions in English first but often she had to repeat or elaborate on her questions in Cantonese to get responses from students. When an acceptable answer in Cantonese was offered she would then rephrase the student’s response in English. The school is located in an industrial area and the parents of the students are from manual/service work backgrounds.

Classroom D:
a Form 1 (first year in secondary school) class of 20 boys and 10 girls. Of the four classes studied by Lin, the teacher of this class used the most Cantonese. She explained vocabulary, gave directions, made the English texts come alive, explained grammatical points, and interacted with students in Cantonese most of the time. The school is on a public housing estate with a similar socio-economic profile to those in Classrooms C and D.
In practice

‘The monolingual principle is now being actively questioned on a number of grounds. Few people would disagree that, since the classroom is the only source of input for many students, the overriding aim should be to establish the target language as the main medium of communication. To achieve this aim, however, they also acknowledge that the mother tongue can be a major resource, as it “launches, as it were, the pupils’ canoes into the foreign language current” (Butzkamm 2003: 32).’

(Littlewood, 2014: 358-359)
In practice

Safe houses

### T:
(reads) ... it is our duty to look after trees and replace them through reforestation. (To class) Reforestation means replanting trees and vegetation. (Continues reading)

### S1:
Reforestation enRaal ennappaa? [What does “reforestation” mean?]

### S2:
kaaTasskkam. Umakku teriyaataa? Social science-ilai paTiccam. [Don’t you know reforestation? We studied about that in Social Science.]

### S1

### S2
illai appaa. mara nkalai tirumpa naTukiratu. [No, man, replanting trees].

(Canagarajah, , 2004:124)
A practical issue that almost continuously engages teachers’ decision-making in the classroom is the role (if any) that they should accord to the students’ mother tongue. (Littlewood, 2014:358)
CLT – a multilingual pedagogy?

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(Littlewood, 2014:358)
Conceptual frames?
Translanguaging and codemeshing

• “translanguaging [refers to] the general communicative competence of multilinguals and /.../codemeshing [refers to] the realisation of translanguaging in texts” (Canagarajah 2011a:403 original emphasis).

• “Codemeshing is not a mechanical activity, where diverse languages are meshed indiscriminately. Multilinguals choose the extent to which the different languages in their repertoire are to be emphasized” (Canagarajah 2011a:413)

Context: university writing classes

Bring students’ multilingual resources into their work
Code-switching

e.g. Auer (1999)

participant-related

discourse-related

change of codes due to features of speakers such as language competences or preference

Due to the situation such as the shift of topic, footing or context

Based on language separation, languages as separate codes
Different routes to the same end

• “Students have to take the dominant conventions seriously and negotiate critically and creatively to find suitable means of translanguaging.” (Canagarajah 2011:415)

• As students shuttle between different genres and contexts, they will develop a keen sensitivity to the rhetorical constraints and possibilities available to them in different communicative situations.” (Canagarajah 2011a:415)
‘The compartmentalized vision of language as separate, bounded linguistic systems is a modernist, Renaissance version of language …’

‘The perceived boundaries between ‘languages’ are arbitrary and depend on political and sociopolitical history …’

Garcia et al (2017:Ch1): Translanguaging
- fluid language practices of bilingual individuals and communities
- pedagogic approaches that promote such practices
The exigencies of learning and of using language have become more complex today. Both bilingual education and ‘foreign’ and ‘second’ language education programs in the 20th century emphasized communicative skills. Today, however, the emphasis is on the development of critical thinking skills and deep comprehension. For example, in the United States, 46 states (as of this writing) have for the first time adopted Common Core State Standards that focus on complex use of language and literacy (see García and Flores, 2014). Schools cannot afford to focus on just developing linguistic communicative skills to later teach students how to use these skills to learn and think. And just education cannot solely use languaging associated with a constructed autonomous language, before introducing other language practices, as was often done in the bilingual education programs of the past (for example, immersion bilingual education or transitional bilingual education programs where only one language was used for a period of time before the other language was introduced). If languaging and knowing are constitutive, as we said before, then schools must pay attention from the beginning to getting students to use all their language practices to think critically and act on the world. But this, of course, cannot happen without translanguaging, for students cannot engage in meaningful discussion, comprehension or designing and redesigning of texts with only a set of emergent language practices. Instead, all the child’s language and semiotic practices must be put in the service of making meaning. Even if schools only value certain ‘standard academic’ language practices, those cannot emerge except in interrelationship with others with which children have practice making meaning at home, in the community and within themselves. Translanguaging brings us closer to the Aleph of language practices. Translanguaging thus also transgresses traditional bilingual education structures and practices.
Code-switching or translanguaging?

Conceptualizations of language

Local language environments and affordances

- Local multilingualism/community languages in the classroom?
- Linguistic diversity in the classroom, but little/no presence of established local community languages?
- Students have little knowledge of focal language?

Goals of language education

- Competence in focal language?
- Effective communication for learning?
- Promotion of ethnic and linguistic equality?