



NATIVE LANGUAGE USE IN YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL: A REVIEW

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Abstract

This review article looks at theoretical viewpoints and practical investigations on the function of first language in learning English as a foreign language. The study of international studies undertaken in Spain, Italy, Turkey, and other countries shows that regulated usage of the original language can improve comprehension, reduce learner anxiety, and expedite vocabulary and grammar learning. The outcomes of this review show that the native tongue may operate as a cognitive and educational resource.

Keywords: First language use; native language support; foreign language acquisition; bilingual pedagogy; learner anxiety reduction; vocabulary and grammar acquisition; English as a foreign language.

Introduction

For many decades, language education approaches were dominated by the notion that the target language should only be used in the classroom. The "English-only" method had a particularly strong influence on the development of communicative language instruction and immersion programs. According to this viewpoint, the presence of the learners' native language was thought to impede language learning and restrict exposure to the target language. However, new research in applied linguistics and multilingual education has challenged this idea. Many experts now contend that the learner's native language may be a valuable cognitive and pedagogical instrument for foreign language learning. Rather than impeding the learning of a new language, the first language may assist learners grasp



complicated concepts, link linguistic systems, and remember new knowledge more successfully.

The purpose of this review article is to analyze theoretical and empirical research addressing the role of the native language in foreign language learning. Particular attention is given to studies demonstrating that the strategic use of the native language can contribute to faster acquisition and stronger retention of the target language. The theoretical foundation for employing the native language in foreign language instruction is heavily based on studies on bilingual education and second language acquisition. Jim Cummins (1979) proposed one of the most influential hypotheses in the field, which has significantly shaped subsequent research on bilingualism and language education. His theory of linguistic interdependence proposed that cognitive and academic skills obtained in one language may be transferred to another. This viewpoint holds that languages have a shared cognitive base, known as Common Underlying Proficiency. According to Cummins, "conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps make input in another language more comprehensible. Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis is an important theory that has strongly influenced how people understand language learning. According to Stephen Krashen (1985), learners acquire a language when they are exposed to input that they can understand but that is slightly above their current level. Meaningful acquisition is impossible if learners do not grasp the linguistic input they receive. In such circumstances, quick explanations in the learners' original language might assist clarify meaning and improve comprehension. Similarly, Vivian Cook (2001) challenges the rigorously monolingual approach to language education by arguing that the first language remains constantly active in the learner's mind and, therefore, cannot simply be switched off. As a result, teachers may utilize information strategically to help students understand and learn more efficiently. More recent study has introduced the notion of translanguaging, which refers to the flexible use of various languages in communication according to García (2009), multilingual learners use their whole language range to build meaning. Translanguaging strategies enable students to digest knowledge in one language while expressing it in another, improving both comprehension and engagement in the learning experience. Empirical research undertaken in a variety of educational settings lends significant support to the pedagogical advantages of bilingual education.



Several studies conducted in Spain looked at bilingual education systems in which English is utilized alongside Spanish in academic instruction. Lasagabaster (2008) researched and contrasted the language competency of students enrolled in bilingual programs to those learning English in typical foreign language classrooms. The findings showed that students in bilingual programs acquired considerably greater levels of English proficiency while maintaining competency in their original language. Another study, done by Cenoz and Genesee (1998), examined multilingual learners studying English as a third language in educational situations that included both Spanish and Basque. The researchers discovered that bilingual learners gained considerable metalinguistic awareness and were better able to transfer linguistic information between languages. Similar outcomes have been reported in Italian educational programs based on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Academic courses are taught in CLIL classes in a foreign language, often English, with the local language utilized on occasion to aid comprehension. According to Coonan (2007), pupils who participated in CLIL programs had better listening comprehension and vocabulary development than those who attended regular language lessons. Research undertaken in Turkey has also looked into the function of the native language in English language training. Auerbach (1993) discovered that using the learners' original language boosted classroom engagement while decreasing student anxiety. Similarly, Yavuz (2012) performed an experimental research on two groups of English learners: one group was taught entirely in English, while the other group received occasional explanations in Turkish. The results showed that students in the bilingual instruction group performed better on vocabulary and reading comprehension tests. These findings were verified by further investigations done in a variety of educational environments. Macaro (2009) investigated classroom interaction in foreign language sessions and discovered that teachers commonly utilize their native language for particular pedagogical goals such as teaching grammatical rules, delivering instructions, or testing understanding. According to Macaro, such deliberate code-switching does not impede language acquisition, but rather increases clarity and efficiency in instruction.

Apart from improved understanding, multilingual training may also have cognitive benefits. Bialystok (2001) found that bilingual children generally



acquire better metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility than monolingual learners. These talents enable bilingual pupils to better examine language structures and employ problem-solving techniques while learning new languages. Young students, in particular, benefit from supportive learning settings in which they fully comprehend classroom instructions and learning objectives. Cameron (2001) highlights the need of meaningful and intelligible information for children's language development. When students do not grasp the directions or assignments, their motivation and engagement may decline. Strategic usage of the local language might therefore serve to keep learners actively engaged in the learning process. Nation (2003) also discusses practical techniques to use the local tongue successfully in language schools. According to Nation, the first language may be valuable for explaining complicated terminology, comparing grammatical structures, and planning instructional activities. Such procedures can save precious teaching time and avoid misunderstandings. The examination of theoretical views and practical investigations shows that using the native tongue in foreign language training does not always impede language acquisition. On the contrary, multiple studies show that well-considered use of the learner's first language may improve understanding, reduce anxiety, and expedite vocabulary and grammar learning.

Research undertaken in several countries, including Spain, Italy, and Turkey, shows that multilingual teaching techniques frequently provide excellent results in terms of language ability and student motivation. These findings call into question the long-held premise that the target language should only be spoken in the classroom. Instead, current research increasingly supports a balanced educational approach in which the target language serves as the major medium of communication while the native language is selectively exploited as a cognitive and instructional resource. Such an approach might be especially advantageous for young students who need clear explanations and supportive learning settings. As a result, incorporating the local language into foreign language training should not be regarded as a pedagogical shortcoming.



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