Bilingual Lessons for ESL School Teachers in Low Resource Contexts

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Abstract

Many ESL/EFL contexts like India have multilingual learners with limited access to the target language. This has initiated a body of research to understand the role of multilingual resources to augment the learning of English in instructional settings. However, most studies are restricted to the creation of bilingual materials in the form of parallel texts, tasks, and vocabulary support. Such materials require a discussion on the logical amalgamation of content through L1 and L2 and highlight translanguaging strategies to transact the bilingual materials. Therefore, in this paper, a range of practical ideas and tasks in the form of three bilingual lessons in Assamese and English to support ESL learning are outlined. These are developed with a spirit of ‘L1 inclusivity’ within the task-based language teaching framework. It is hoped that such systematic guidelines can help primary and secondary level ESL teachers use bilingual materials effectively in their classrooms.

Keywords: multilingual resources, parallel text and tasks, translanguaging strategies, L1 inclusivity

Introduction

In recent times there has been a worldwide re-evaluation of the role of multilingual learners’ own language(s) use in English language teaching and learning (Hall and Cook, 2012). In India, it triggered a range of research studies to draw upon learners’ multilingual resources in ESL classrooms (Durairajan, 2017). It also generated discussions on exploiting bi/multilingual resources in the ESL classrooms to emphasize the need for bi/multilingual instructional materials to promote multilingual
practices for English and content learning (Anderson, 2018). These studies have mostly highlighted the role of texts and tasks in two languages and textbooks with bilingual vocabulary support (Erling et al., 2017) and texts with bilingual word lists (Hall & Cook, 2012).

It is important to note that the bilingual resources if to be used successfully need some methodological guidelines, such that they can be transacted meaningfully in class. This is particularly useful for all teachers who deal with low resource contexts because they lack opportunities to use such resources maximally. Often their contexts are paralyzed with:

- resource-impoverished environment,
- limited exposure and proficiency in English,
- the dearth of professional training and development activities.

Therefore, in this paper, as a first attempt, three bilingual lesson plans are presented mainly for teachers and educators who work in classrooms with:

- bilingual/multilingual learners,
- teachers who may or may not share the same language(s) with the learners,
- English as a ‘subject’ (non-English Medium Instruction schools).

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

The purposeful, principled, and simultaneous use of two languages in the same classroom to augment proficiency and content learning in one or both languages dates back to the Welsh model of translanguaging, involving careful and planned use of Welsh and English (Williams, 1996 as cited in Heugh et al., 2019, p. 2). In Hong Kong, such concurrent use happened between the home/local language and English, known as ‘purposeful translanguaging’ (Heugh, 2015). In India, too, purposeful alterations of languages have been visualized in pedagogical practices ‘rooted in multilinguality’ (Agnihotri, 2007) and documented in two meta-analysis reports of Indian multilingual classrooms (Anderson, 2018; Anderson & Lightfoot, 2018). Furthermore, Mukhopadhyay (2020), in her attempt to frame a translilingual pedagogy, reported a systematic alternation of Telugu, English, and Hindi in an Indian ESL classroom.

**Bilingual/multilingual Resources: Policies and Projects**

At the backdrop of Indian grassroots multilingualism, attempts have been
made at policy levels to reflect the multilingual ethos. Consequently, a few projects explore the implementation of multilingualism in classrooms. The *National Focus Group Position Paper* (2006, pp. 12-13) states that children’s other languages strengthen English teaching/learning in regional-medium schools. It offers suggestions on languages working in tandem, or in parallel to bring multilingualism into the Indian English classrooms utilising translingual practices. It also mentions experimental work on bilingual or mixed-code texts to teach reading. The recently published *National Education Policy [NEP]* (2020) emphasizes the need for a bilingual approach and materials, especially for those students whose home language may be different from their medium of instruction (p. 13). It promotes the idea of contextualising instructional resources with the creation of national material having local/regional flavour (p. 17). However, while the NEP advocates the use of bilingual materials, it lacks clear guidelines for their implementation. This is perhaps beyond its current scope, but a few pointers would have helped.

Further exploring multilingual classrooms there are two projects that are worth mentioning because of the strategies they propose: One, Erling et al. (2017) in their multilingual project on implementation of EMI policies at the primary schools in Ghana and Bihar, India have recommended the need for creating resources in local languages; context-appropriate resources through bilingual vocabulary, context-relevant illustrations (p. 150). Two, the *MultiLiLa* project (Tsimpli et al., 2020) has investigated the learning outcomes of bi/multilingual grade four and five students from low Socio-Economic Status (SES) families in Delhi, Hyderabad, and Patna and proposed the value of utilising students’ home language(s) to learn other languages and content subjects, and emphasized story retelling as a rich multilingual resource.

**Bi/multilingual Resources: Creation and Availability**

A renewed exploration of the pedagogic value of multilingualism has initiated the creation of multilingual resource books and digital platforms: Deller & Rinvolucr (2007) in their teacher resource book outline activities for teachers who do not share the learners’ language(s) or teach mixed-language classes. Hall & Cook (2012) list country/region-specific materials which incorporate learners’ languages through bilingual word lists, own-language rubrics, or grammatical explanations in L1 (p. 299). Kerr (2019) discuss teaching techniques such as sandwiching, bilingual
instructions, translanguaging strategies, own-language moments along with tools like online translation, bilingual dictionaries, and flashcards. Heugh et al. (2019) outline strategies, activities, and projects for sub-Saharan Africa, South, and East Asian contexts.

A critical look at these existing resources reveal the presence of bi/multilingual materials that teachers can access as a starting point. However, there is a need to cater to the local needs of our students for whom the classroom is the primary site of target language input. Also, more conscious teacher efforts are required to transact such resources meaningfully in class to develop ESL proficiency.

Therefore, I now present three bilingual lesson plans with a range of practical ideas and classroom tasks in Assamese and English. These are prepared for three levels of proficiency and highlight a systematic use of L1 in primary level ESL classes. Thus, these are developed with a spirit of ‘L1 inclusivity’ and designed within the task-based language teaching framework. The lessons are presented to highlight how to use translanguaging according to micro-framework proposed by Garcia & Hesson, 2015 (p. 232).

**Lesson Plan One: Sounds of Animals** (50 minutes)

**Level:** Class 3 to 4

**Aim(s):**
- To learn words related to sounds made by animals
- To use such words in describing animals

**Presentation and practice:**

1. Distribute the Assamese poem ‘amaator maat’ [animals’ sounds] (Das, 2002) to the students. It is about the different animals and their sounds described in a child-friendly manner.

2. Read it aloud to them.

3. Ask students to read the poem in groups and underline the names of animals in red pen/pencil and the sounds they make in blue pen/pencil.

4. Draw a table on the blackboard with two columns: *jantu* (animal) and *maat* (sound). Call students to fill each column (Table 1).
Table 1: Animals and Sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assamese (animal)</th>
<th>Assamese (sound)</th>
<th>English (animal)</th>
<th>English (sound)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jantu</td>
<td>maat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kopooi (dove)</td>
<td>kuruliyaa (shrilling, screeching)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paaro (pigeon)</td>
<td>roon (coo)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moumaakhi (bee)</td>
<td>gun gun (hum, buzz)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhomoraa (humble-bee)</td>
<td>gun gun (hum, buzz)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Read the animals’ names and their sounds written in Assamese for the whole class.

6. Write the English equivalents of the animals’ names and the sounds they make in the table with the help of strategies like using illustrations from the book, activating students’ word/world knowledge. For example, decode the big word ‘ghan(r)sirikaa’ into two smaller words ‘ghan’ and ‘sirikaa’. Then, students can find the English equivalents, in this case, ‘ghan’ means house and ‘sirikaa’ means sparrow.

7. Read the name of the animals and their sounds in Assamese and English. Ask students to repeat.

8. Show pictorial bilingual word cards where the names of the animals are written in both Assamese and English with a corresponding picture and students say the sounds they make in English. If the students fail to do so, the teacher asks them to say the Assamese words. Then, the teacher supplies the English equivalents.

Follow-up activity:

1. Play the sounds of animals discussed using a smartphone and ask students to write their names on a piece of paper in either Assamese or English.

2. Ask one group of students to mimic the sounds of the animal and the rest try to guess and say the corresponding names in English.

Extension activity: Bilingual animal poster making project

1. Students can prepare posters by either drawing or pasting animal cut-outs and writing about them in L1 and L2. They can place the descriptions side-by-side. While writing, they can be given the following cue questions:
How does the animal look like? What do they eat? Where do they live? How do they behave? Are they harmful/helpful to a human? Is there a share-worthy experience with the animal?

2. If required, teachers can explain these questions in L1. As a preparation, students can use the following adapted K-W-L Chart (Table 2):

K-W-L Chart
Select an animal you want to write about. In the first column, write in Assamese what you already know about the animal. In the second column, write what you want to know about the animal. After you have completed your reading from newspapers, picture dictionaries, consulting teachers/parents, observing in the neighbourhood write what you have learned in the third column. Teachers may help students with one example.

Table 2: Adapted K-W-L Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>moikijaanu (What I Know)</th>
<th>moikijaanibobisaarisu (What I Want to Know)</th>
<th>moikixikilu (What I Learned)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>paaro-bordekhiboloidhuniya (pigeons are beautiful)</td>
<td>paaro-borbudhiyakneki? (Are pigeons intelligent?)</td>
<td>prithibirbudhiyaksaraai-borogetaa (One of the most intelligent birds on the planet)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Ask students to paste their posters on the classroom walls and discuss them.

Lesson Plan Two: Let’s Read (60 minutes)
Level: Class 5
Aim(s):
- To read for specific information (Theme: Celebrating Local Festivals)
- To prepare bilingual text-map
- To write text summary using the map

Presentation and practice:
1. Students see two pictures: a plateful delicacy of bihu, and bhela ghor (a thatched house). The teacher asks the following questions in Assamese:
● What can you see in the pictures?
[laddoo, pitha aaru bhela ghor (laddoo, cake, and thatched house)]¹
● Where can you see them?
[ghare ghare (every household)]
● When do you usually see these items?
[magh bihu-r time-t² (during Sankranti)]

2. Discuss the students’ responses in L1 and L2.
3. Distribute the following reading text.

![Festivities of Bhogali Bihu (Sankranti)](image)

In Assam, the time during Sankranti is called magh or bhogali bihu. It is a harvest festival, celebrated at the end of the harvesting season (January – February). The festivity starts a day before the actual bihu, called Uruka (the Bihu Eve) – a community feasting with a bonfire. All the families of the community get together and contribute generously to the meal. They fetch meat, fish, rice, vegetables, or anything grew and farmed by the farmers.

Unlike normal days, that night all the men cook the meal in the open air. The women and children sit by the fire, sing songs, play fun games. Some women make pithas (cakes) such as sunga pitha (made of sticky rice inside young bamboo), til pitha (made of sticky rice), gheela pitha (made of jaggery and rice flour), narkolor laru (coconut laddoo), poka laru (rice flour and jaggery mixed laddoo). Once the food is ready, the villagers dine inside a bhela ghor (a temporary/makeshift huts made of dried straws, bamboo and banana leaves). Villagers make mejî also by arranging logs of firewood.

The following day is called magh bihu. People invariably take bath before sunrise, houses are cleaned, doors and windows are kept open for God and his blessings to flow in. The sutal or the front yard is cleaned with cow dung and mud. People show respect to the bhela ghor by lighting an earthen lamp inside it. Then, they set it on fire with offerings of til, rice, and dubori bon to express thankfulness to the paddy field and the sky for the good year passed by and the year ahead.

Then, the second round of feasting or jolpan – the Assamese breakfast of homemade cereal made of rice like muri, akhoi, xandoh, or sira. These delicacies are enjoyed with curd set specifically in earthen pots and liquid form of jaggery (like caramel). The breakfast is followed by enjoying the homemade snack items such as kaath alu (air potato), alu pura (roasted potato), kosu pura (roasted colocasia), and pithas. The rest of the day is reserved for visiting friends or relatives or taking part in the traditional games such as Tekeli Bhonga (pot-breaking), Koni Juj (egg fight), Hen Juj (hawk fight), Mohar Juj (buffalo fight), and Kori Khet – a royal game of Ahom dynasty, Assam.

4. Present the following bilingual text-map and ask students to fill in the required information in Assamese.
5. Discuss the responses and provide English equivalents (wherever required) with the help of students (whole class activity).

6. Ask students to write a summary of the text in L1 from the text-map. Ask them to translate the summary into English.

Extension activity:

1. Find out the festivals that happen during Sankranti in other states. Talk about these in class in Assamese.

2. Use the text-map and do some research about the festivities of two other types of bihus: kongali and rongali. Write paragraph(s) using those in the Assamese followed by English.

Lesson Plan Three: Bilingual Poem-Writing (50 minutes)

Level: Class 6

Aim(s):

- To translate from Assamese to English
- To reflect on the experience of translation

Presentation and practice:

1. Distribute the Assamese poem.

2. Ask students to translate each line into English.
3. Write the lines side-by-side. Assist students in the translation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assamese poem</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[moi ejan] LORAA</td>
<td>I am a BOY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aasejaar eta) PUTALAA</td>
<td>He has a TOY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(khelo taar logot) PRATIDINE</td>
<td>Play with it EVERY DAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(koro taak bebohaar natun) DGARANE</td>
<td>Using it in a new WAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[xeye mor maa-ye] KOI</td>
<td>So, my mother SAYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(nitoi aanand-r din) HOI</td>
<td>Every day becomes a HAPPY DAY!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Ask students to edit the English version keeping the words/expressions/images used in the Assamese and supply the rhyming words in English.

2. Write the edited version on the blackboard, underline the changes.

   **Edited English version**
   
   I am a BOY
   Who has a TOY
   I play with it EVERY DAY
   Using it in new WAYS
   That’s why my mother SAYS
   Every day is a HAPPY DAY!

3. Ask students to read aloud the English version and share their experience of translation. They can use Assamese to express their observations such as the poetic word ‘nitoi’ is used than the plain counterpart ‘xadaya’ (both means every day), change in plural marker ‘s’ in WAYS to maintain the rhyme even though the corresponding Assamese sentence has a singular marker.

The use of translanguaging strategies, purposes and resources (Hesson et al., 2014, p. 121) are summarized in Table 3 below:
Table 3: Use of Translanguaging in the Lessons: A Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson plans</th>
<th>Translanguaging strategies</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Translanguaging resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1            | 1. Use of L1 poem as a warmer.  
2. Draw a table with L1 lexical items and their English equivalents side by side.  
3. Collaborative work e.g. calling students to write in the board, mimicking-guessing, poster making.  
4. Move students between languages in the input (e.g. stages 6, 8 in presentation and practice) and output (e.g. follow-up and extension activities).  
5. Move students between modes of delivering inputs (e.g. reading L1 poem, listening to pre-recorded sounds of animals, listening to the imitation of the sounds of animals, studying reference materials in both L1 and English). | 1. To activate students’ schema, generate interest in the topic.  
2. To show the co-existence of languages, notice lexical synonyms.  
3. To increase the quality and quantity of students’ participation.  
4. To replicate real language use.  
5. To experience diverse modes of inputs. | A topic-related poem in L1  
Pictorial bilingual word cards  
Bilingual animal poster  
Adapted K-W-L chart |
| 2            | 1. Use of topic-related culturally familiar pictures as a lead-in to the discussion.  
2. Discuss students’ responses in L1 and English.  
3. Use of culturally, linguistically, and personally relevant reading text.  
4. Move students between languages in the input (e.g. the extension activity doing a small piece of research).  
5. Move students between modes of delivering inputs (e.g. reading a text in English, visually representing the same text in a bilingual text-map). | 1. To activate students’ background knowledge.  
2. To expose them to the variety of language inputs.  
3. To foster students’ bilingual reading identities.  
4. To use their entire linguistic repertoire experience ‘multilinguality’ in real life.  
5. To experience text-discourse structure and to raise students’ awareness of the notion of equivalence across languages. | A topic-related culturally familiar picture  
Reading text that contains both English and L1 lexi on  
Bilingual text-map  
Multilingual research |
| 3            | 1. Use of a poem in L1.  
2. Ask students to translate lines of the poem from L1 to English.  
3. Ask students to place each line side by side.  
4. Ask students to edit the English draft version of the poem.  
5. Write the edited version of the English poem on the blackboard. | 1. To introduce the topic.  
2. To notice the similarities and differences across the languages.  
3. To create a visual feel of the language features and help students notice them.  
4. To compare the accuracy and appropriacy of the expressions in L1 and English.  
5. To create a sense of ownership of the learning. | L1 poem |

Comments

Across the lessons, there is a conscious integration of L1 through the various parts of the lessons as a way of purposeful use of learners’ L1 or translanguaging. There is a gradual progression from use of learners’ L1 to support the target language without compromising the comprehension and production of it (here English). A prominent translanguaging strategy used is the choice of the languages learners are given to respond to teachers’ inputs. For instance, L1 cue questions and K-W-L chart in L1 are used as a scaffold to prepare a bilingual poster (Lesson plan 1), whereas only a bilingual text-map is used in Lesson plan 2. No prompt questions are used to guide the research or write paragraph(s). It is important to note that very minimal help is provided in the translation task (Lesson plan 3). It is assumed that students can notice language-specific features (word choice, word order)
and experiment on the strategy of rhyming. In sharing their reflections of the experience of using translation, students are encouraged to use L1 as this would require metalinguistic knowledge more easily expressed in their mother tongue.

Conclusion

To conclude, the paper demonstrates a few practical steps that teachers can use to attempt translanguaging in the ESL classroom and communicatively explore the utility of bi/multilingual materials. These could be adapted for use with not only low resource contexts but with a variety of students across different classroom contexts. It is hoped that such a focus on building translanguaging strategies and resources will enable teachers to plan for multilingual learners by understanding the use of translanguaging pedagogy as an effective and integrative ESL development tool.

Endnotes

1. Expected responses for each question in Assamese.
2. English word interspersed with Assamese.
3. ‘word-for-word translation’ is provided in the [ ] bracket, while the ( ) bracket is used for ‘versioning/adapting’ (Heugh et al. 2017 cited in Heugh et al. 2019)

References


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