Facilitating Language Acquisition Through Code-Switching Using Multilingual Materials and Discourse Oriented Pedagogy: A Case Study of Roshni

Jayasree Kulakkunnath

Abstract

Code-switching strategies facilitated by multilingual materials and discourse oriented pedagogy (DOP) can help approach language holistically and enable learners to acquire target languages. This paper reports on a project Roshni as an application of pedagogical use of code-switching in the language classroom. The project describes the grassroots level work being done in the Ernakulam district of Kerala to facilitate language acquisition of children from migrant workers' families who have to learn Malayalam (official language), English and Hindi in school. The paper provides a brief account of the context for launching the Roshni project, the theoretical assumptions of DOP and how this is translated into classroom practices by adopting code-switching practices innovatively. In doing so, the approach supports linguistic and socio-cultural diversities of multilingual learners.

Keywords: code-switching, multilingual classroom, discourse oriented pedagogy, project Roshni

Introduction: Launch of Project Roshni

Migration of families for education, career, better living standards, and even political ideologies, is on the rise globally. With Kerala sending a large number of workers overseas, there is a rising need for migrant labourers from other states to carry out Kerala's economic activities (Centre for Development Studies Report, 2018, as cited in Paliath, 2019). Many

of these workers, predominantly from Bihar, West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam and Nepal, have settled in Ernakulam with their families. Children from these families go to different government and government-aided schools of the district. According to a survey conducted by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Ernakulam has seen a rise in migrant students by about 44 per cent from 1,753 to 3,985 in the year 2019-20 (Theresa, 2019). However, these migrant children are not regular to classes and many of them even drop out of the school in the middle of an academic year due to several reasons such as the floating nature of the migrant families in accordance with the bread-winner's locale of work, children being taken to workplaces to assist their parents or being given the charge of looking after their younger siblings and low parental awareness about importance of education.

As far as the case of migrant children enrolled in schools is concerned, one significant issue to be addressed inside the classroom has been the linguistic barriers faced by the migrant learners who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Not only do they have to grapple with an unknown language of instruction (Malayalam) but also interact with multilingual classmates in new surroundings leading to a feeling of cultural alienation and a sense of marked displacement.

It was in this context that the District Administration of Ernakulam launched the educational project 'Roshni' (with the support of District Panchayat, District Institute for Education and Training (DIET), SSA, Non Governmental Organisations and the financial aid from Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited) to enhance the social participation and educational performance of migrant children on October 19, 2017. The project, conceived as a socio-cultural bridge, is committed to bring down the school drop-out rate of the migrant students. The intervention facilitates them to acquire proficiency in Malayalam, English, Hindi and their mother tongue.

Roshni was initially launched in four schools of the Ernakulam district in the year 2017-18 (Phase 1); it got up-scaled to 20 schools in 2018-19 (Phase II) and 38 schools in 2019-20 (Phase III) covering both aided and government schools, across the district. In fact, on January 29, 2020,the Governor of Kerala Arif Mohammed Khan announced that the Roshni scheme would be extended across all districts in the state (Praveen, 2020). Around 40 multilingual Education Volunteers (EVs) at Roshni,

provide migrant students an extra class of about 1 hour that begins with a nutritious breakfast every morning before the regular classes. The integrated activity-oriented modules designed for the program have been observed to be effective in improving the academic standards of the students. The pedagogical tools have been modelled on the theories of second language acquisition without putting inclusiveness at stake.

In Phase III of Roshni, the team has ventured into developing innovative packages based on multilingual pedagogy to ensure the acquisition of Malayalam (the instructional medium), English (academic second language), Hindi as well as the enrichment of the mother tongue of the learners. For the primary classes it is SMILE (Special Multilingual package for Introducing Languages to Elementary Children); another package is called SMART (Special Multilingual Approach for Rapid acquisition of languages among Teenagers) that makes use of a multimedia text titled RACE (Rapid Acquisition of Competence in English). It is an evolving text to integrate activities in multiple languages that has been conceived and developed by Anandan (2000).

Discourse-Oriented Pedagogy

The Discourse Oriented Pedagogy (DOP) adopted in Roshni was evolved by the school research team of Government High School, Binanipuram led by the author, an academic coordinator, primary teacher and research fellow, in consultation with Dr. K.N. Anandan the academic consultant of Roshni. DOP is built on Krashen's notion of 'comprehensible input' (1981); but it encompasses a range of other strategies to translate this notion into classroom practice. Thus a number of means are employed to make the input comprehensible to the learners. These include –

   (i) presentation of the narratives,

  (ii) modular transaction of units,

 (iii) process-specific peer interaction,

 (iv) build on micro-processes of reading by developing graphical organizers, and

  (v) construction of discourses (both oral and written).

Interaction is construed as dialoguing invoking the use of multiple languages, thereby creating an environment for code-switching to take place naturally. Above all, the intervention endorses the notion

of invoking Emotional Gestalts in the minds of the learners, a notion proposed in Anandan (2006), where he states that language experience sustains in human minds as emotional gestalts. An instance of a gestalt can be explained in the following manner: We might have met people at several places and might have talked to them about several things. We do not remember all these. But there are certain encounters that will remain fresh in our minds. This is because of the emotional vibrancy those encounters have created in us.

DOP is built around the theorizations of innateness (Chomsky, 1975), processes of second language acquisition (Cook and Newson, 1996), cognitive psychology (Pinker, 1994), the constructivist perspective on second language pedagogy by Anandan (2006), role of multilingualism in teaching English by Agnihotri (2010) and whole language acquisition (Weaver, 1984).

The main tenets of DOP are the following:

- Language is a biological system of human beings which gets unfolded;
- Language acquisition is an unconscious process;
- Language is acquired not by learning and practising isolated language features as words, phrases and sentences/utterances but by experiencing clusters of linguistic expressions involved in the reception and production of discourses;
- Language is not the totality of the four skills (LSRW) but the linguistic competence manifest in the performance of their skills;
- Language acquisition can take place only in a collaborative environment where the child gets ample opportunities to get involved in intra and inter personal communication;
- Language is acquired not through repetition but through recurrence of exposure.

DOP assumes that language exists not as discrete sounds, words and sentences but as connected speech (or discourses), and that the only way to acquire language is to produce discourses. DOP when applied to multiple languages for communication can create a context for code-switching and provide comprehensible input to help learners acquire proficiency in target languages. Code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the

context of a single conversation. A multilingual facilitator who switches between learners' mother tongue and the medium of instruction (or second language) can be employed to scientifically address the linguistic barrier.

Code-Switching as a Pedagogical Tool at Roshni

Use of code-switching in a discourse oriented pedagogy would mean solving language tasks in a multilingual manner. This would allow learners to mix their mother tongue and the language of instruction inter or intra sententially. At initial stages of code-switching, the syntax of the mother tongue would be the base and English words or words from the medium of instruction could be inserted.

Providing code-switching opportunities to learners can serve as an effective pedagogic tool for facilitating second language acquisition. For example narratives can be presented for unveiling a plot that can involve children psychologically. To begin with, most part of the narrative can be in the mother tongue and the facilitator can switch over to English/ Malayalam in a spontaneous and contextualized manner. This strategy is different from using the mother tongue to translate a text, or to explain word meanings, and check comprehension.

At Roshni, code-switching strategies adopted by teacher-teams comprising of a teacher and a volunteer, have been quite effective as illustrated below:

- Using a visual prompt (picture/video) for interaction, the teacher speaks in Malayalam and the volunteer code-switches into different languages (please note that the volunteers are posted in a school considering the linguistic priority of that school).

  For example: If it is a picture-based interaction (showing a running cat); let's see how the classroom discussion facilitates code-switching. The teacher poses a question in Tamil and the volunteer code switches to Hindi.

  ഈചിത്രത്തില്എന്ത്കാണുന്നു *?(What do you see in the picture?)*

  यह चित्र देखो, चित्र में क्या दिखता है?

- Children respond in their mother tongue:

പൂച്ച. ....*(cat)*

बिल्ली*.....*

- Volunteer/teacher interacts and code-switches into other languages like Tamil or Oriya simultaneously:

अच्छा ... . बिल्ली.....പൂച്ച

बिल्ली क्या करती है? (What is the cat doing?)

പൂച്ചഎന്ത്ചെയ്യുന്നു?

क्या बिल्ली दौड़ती है।

अच्छा .... बिल्ली दौड़ती है।

പൂച്ചഓടുന്നു.(The cat is running)

- Volunteer/teacher code-switches and megaphones into Malayalam, the targeted language, very naturally, articulating clearly and slowly, maintaining an appropriate pace, so that she is audible to each and every one.

- Teacher continues the narrative in Malayalam with voice modulation, pitch, eye-hand coordination, appropriate body language etc. assuring the attention of all children while the volunteer supplements it and code-switches into Oriya, Assamese, Hindi, etc.

- Children respond in their mother tongue and the volunteer code-switches and megaphones their text into Malayalam.

- Teacher/volunteer writes the elicited responses on a chart/blackboard with appropriate pace and utters it syllabically taking adequate care to capture the mental attention of all children regardless of their language.

- The children read each sentence graphically and all the sentences in the text are elicited through this process.

As observed in Roshni classes, the Hindi/Oriya/Assamese speaking children could read the elicited text in Malayalam graphically. They were able to identify sentences, words and letters written in Malayalam. The classes helped the learners develop phonemic awareness and understand the graphical representation of each phoneme. Through this process the learners were also able to write picture descriptions in three to four languages subsequently.

Materials Adaptation, Transaction and Production in Roshni

Ever since the conceptualization of DOP, more than two decades ago, theme-based modular transaction based on prescribed textbooks have been incorporated in classroom practice in the states of Kerala SCERT (2007) and states of Andhra Pradesh SCERT (2011). Pedagogically, a 'module' can be defined as an activity package that leads to the construction of knowledge. Each module includes theme-centric interaction based on oral narratives and discourses, reading texts, and writing tasks. Interaction takes place at various points in the modular transaction and serves as a binding thread that holds all the modules together. It provides a holistic linguistic experience for the learners. At various points of the transaction, the learners have to work independently and in collaboration with others.

However, the multilingual and multi-grade context of Roshni classrooms necessitated further adaptation of the modular transaction to suit the needs of specific learner groups. For instance, collaboration, a constructivist feature was likely to fail in Roshni's multilingual context where learners were from diverse linguistic backgrounds unless code-switching is brought in. Similarly, the multi-grade situation at Roshni also ruled out the possibility of using reading passages prescribed in any textbook for any particular grade.

So how were the materials adapted in Roshni classrooms and how was the modular transaction process altered? Teacher/volunteer used theme-pictures for interaction by virtue of which the learners connected to their own socio-cultural context. The facilitator worked on the perceptions of the learners, elicited their ideas and wrote them on the board in multiple languages. Therefore, the teacher also became a learner; children felt that their languages and cultural practices had a place in the classroom. They did not feel alienated and eventually, did not drop out of school. Eventually they began to realize, as they discovered systems of different languages present in class, that the language of the medium of instruction is not linguistically superior to what they speak.

Short films, videos, songs and pictures have been used as sources for giving the learners emotionally loaded linguistic and visual inputs. By virtue of the code-switching strategy, the learners gained confidence in producing need-based and contextually relevant discourses. Since language is primarily speech, the thrust has been on the oral production

of language, which eventually projects into reading and writing discourses across multiple languages. Activities used in class include sharing narratives, creative drawing, singing, dancing and drama and children work in small linguistic groups and the discourses generated in the mother tongue of the learners are translated into other available languages of the learners. Eventually, every child attains a basic level of proficiency to produce oral and written discourses across one or two target languages. Thus, culture specific multimedia materials facilitated the learners to understand things better and paved the way for meaningful cultural exchanges.

Conclusion

A unique element of the pedagogy practiced in Roshni has been the use of multilingual, theme based texts using audio/visual aids in addition to the printed textbook. This has encouraged active participation of the learners during the production of discourses. Since its inception Roshni has played a crucial role in strengthening the role of the mother tongue in facilitating second language acquisition by invoking code-switching as a pedagogical tool to retain the linguistic and cultural diversity of the learners from migrant families. The results of this project testify that code-switching, as used in multilingual and multi-grade classes, is applicable even in content classrooms and to teach other languages as a subject. They validate Agnihotri's claim that, "levels of language proficiency enhance significantly with metalinguistic awareness which is most eminently achieved if multilinguality is maintained at the centre of language teaching activities" (2010: p. 4).

References

Agnihotri, R.K. (2010). Multilinguality and the Teaching of English in India. *EFL Journal* 1(1), 1-13, The English and Foreign Languages University.

Anandan, K.N. (2000). *Rapid acquisition of competence in English: Multimedia materials for adolescent learners*. Universal Asset.

Anandan, K.N. (2006). *Tuition to intuition, The constructivist perspective on second language pedagogy*. Transcend.

Chomsky, N. (1975). *Reflections on Language*. Pantheon.

Cook, V., and Newson, M. (1996). *Chomsky's universal grammar: An introduction*. Wiley Blackwell.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*.

Pergamon Press.

Paliath, S. (2019). How a Kerala district's initiative is helping migrant workers. Retrieved from https://www.indiaspend.com/how-a-kerala-districts-initiative-is-helping-migrant-workers-children-stay-in-school/

Pinker, S. (1994). *The language instinct.* Morrow.

Praveen, M.P. (2020, February 1). Project Roshni going places. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from (https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Kochi/project-roshni-going-places/article30706916.ece

State Council of Education, Research and Training. (2007). *Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007*. SCERT.

State Council of Education, Research and Training. (2011). *State Curriculum Framework 2011*. SCERT.

Theresa, D. Roshni. (2019, August 29) Scheme paves a brighter path for migrant students in Kochi. Retrieved from https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/kochi/2019/aug/29/roshni-scheme-paves-a-brighter-path-for-migrant-students-in-kochi-2025744.html

Weaver, C. (1994). *Reading process and practice: From socio-psycholinguistics to whole language* (2nd ed.). Heinemann Educational Books Inc.

Jayasree Kulakkunnath, primary teacher and research fellow from Kerala, is working as the academic coordinator of Roshni. She is interested in developing pedagogical research models.

jayasreekjayasree@gmail.com