

Taiwanese English Teachers' Attitudes to Using Chinese in Teaching English at Elementary School

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Abstract: This research paper investigated Taiwanese primary school teachers' attitudes towards using Chinese in English language teaching (ELT). As part of a new educational policy, Taiwan aims to become a bilingual country by 2030, and the use of English in teaching all subjects at school is being implemented. The study investigated the debate over the function of Chinese in ELT and whether it has a beneficial or detrimental impact on English learning. This paper provided a historical overview of language teaching approaches that employ the first (L1) and second (L2) languages in second language (L2) instruction and learning, as well as the responsibilities of the L1 in the L2 classroom. The research concluded that using L1 in L2 teaching provides more time to practice L2 and assists with clarification purposes. The study emphasised the need for further investigation into the effectiveness of L1 use in L2 acquisition.

Keywords: *Bilingual, Teacher's Attitudes, Using L1, English Teaching*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the new educational policy - Taiwan will be a bilingual country by 2030; Taiwan is now on the way to applying English in teaching all subjects at school. Several studies were conducted to improve English teaching and learning quality in Taiwan. For many years, there has been a debate regarding using the first language (L1) in second language (L2) classrooms. Researchers have recently addressed the issue of code-switching in language classrooms. Thus, the Chinese's role in teaching English has become a controversial topic discussed by many teachers and researchers. The question was whether Chinese should be utilised in English language teaching (ELT) and whether using Chinese had a good or negative influence on English language learning. This study was adapted from the prior research done in the Vietnamese context by Kieu Hang Kim Anh. In her study, she found the essential role of L1 in teaching L2, such as explaining grammar rules, giving instructions, and checking comprehension.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. History of L1 and L2 Language Teaching Techniques in L2 Teaching and Learning

The grammar-translation has been used in the L2 classroom since the early nineteenth century in Western countries. Larsen stated that the origin of grammar-translation was the instruction of classical languages, Latin and Greek. The need for learning L2 in the Western world changed substantially towards the end of the eighteenth century as trade and travel between European countries increased. People typically learned a second language to communicate, not just to comprehend literary works. Therefore, students required a new method emphasising spoken language, the direct approach. According to the direct method theory, L2 learning should mirror L1 learning; thus, learners should be submerged in L2 when learning L2. Stern, Tarone, and Yule (1983) stated that L2 should be used in the language classroom for instruction

and communication, and L1 avoidance should be considered. The Audiolingual Method evolved from the Army Method, which was developed in response to the need for Americans to learn the languages of their allies and adversaries during World War II to communicate effectively in the target language (Larsen, 2000). In contrast, the Communicative Approach has garnered the most attention from the community concerned with teaching languages during the past half-century. There was a restriction on using L1 whenever possible, and the translation might be used when learners struggled to understand the concepts (Ellis, 2004).

B. The roles of L1 in the L2 Classroom

1) The monolingual approach in L2 Learning

Three fundamental principles supported the monolingual approach. Initially, humans were exposed to their aural environment beginning in infancy. People observed, imitated, and responded to what they heard to achieve L1 mastery. As a result, it was vital that L2 could be attained by the same process as L1 learning (Cook, 2001). Regarding the second principle, Cook (2000) stated that interference from L1 knowledge could impede L2 learning. According to Krashen (1981), L1 was a source of defects in L2 performance. When only L2 was used in the L2 classroom, all interactions could demonstrate the use of the target language and proclaimed the significance of L2 in satisfying learners' communicative needs (Cook, 2001; Miles, 2004). Furthermore, the monolingual approach was criticised for its assertion that maximum exposure to the target language (L2) was required for successful L2 acquisition. However, Phillipson (1992, p. 211) argued that this was not the case since "...there is no correlation between the quantity of L2 input, in an environment where the learners are exposed to L2 in the community and the academic success."

2) Support for the Bilingual Approach

The advocates of the bilingual strategy have argued against the monolingual strategy based on three primary points. Phillipson (1992) argued that the nature of the monolingual method was its primary drawback. The infeasibility of excluding L1 from beginner-level monolingual classes was another reason why the monolingual approach needed to be revised. Therefore, students might get disengaged if the instruction was provided solely in English.

Cook (1999, p. 186) disputed the idea that native speakers are the most effective teachers, saying that these traits are "not a necessary part of the definition of a native speaker." These traits, including fluency and acceptable language use, might be learned through training, according to Phillipson (1992). In this context, Phillipson proposed that the ideal foreign language instructor has near-native proficiency in the target language and shares the same linguistic and cultural heritage as the students.

3) Effectiveness of L1 use in the L2 Classroom

Using L1 to teach L2 allowed more time to practise L2 because comprehension was attained more quickly. According

to Morahan (2010), when an attempt has been made to communicate the concepts, but students were still confused, teachers had to resort to L1 for clarification. In early and intermediate language classes, L1 was frequently used to give instructions, explain word meanings, elaborate complex ideas, and clarify intricate grammar concepts. (Tang, 2002). From the advantages and disadvantages of L1 use in L2 learning, research should be conducted to ascertain the attitudes of Taiwanese elementary school instructors towards using Chinese in English instruction.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

Ten Taiwanese English instructors (5 females and 5 males) from various Taiwanese primary schools responded to the study's questionnaire. All of the instructors held a bachelor's degree. They differed considerably concerning age and years of teaching experience. They were over 24 years old with various time of teaching experience. Half of the ten questionnaire respondents were granted an interview. The teachers interviewed were assigned pseudonyms.

B. Instrumentations

The present research utilised two data collection instruments adapted from previous research conducted by Anh (2012) in Vietnam, including a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The data from the questionnaire was cross-checked with those from the semi-structured interview to gather more precise information about participant justifications for their attitudes. Each teacher was interviewed semi-structured in English and Chinese. Five to ten minutes passed between each interview. They were based on the following fundamental questions:

1. Should teachers use Chinese in ELT in Taiwan?
2. If not, why should teachers not use Chinese in ELT?
3. If yes, in what situations should teachers use Chinese in ELT?
4. Why should teachers use Chinese in these situations?
5. How often should teachers use Chinese in ELT?

In the interview, the examples and some follow-up inquiries were used to encourage the participants to provide more specific information.

C. Procedures

Participants received the questionnaire via Google form. With the participant's consent, interviews were conducted after Google Forms data collection. During the interviews, notes were made.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The use of Chinese in ELT was strongly encouraged by all participants, which was the same as in the Vietnamese context. According to them, Chinese should be used in English teaching to facilitate students' comprehension. Most of the teachers (67 %) agreed that teachers should use Chinese "rarely", and the rest of them suggested that Chinese should be used "sometimes" in English teaching, which means that the use of L1 should be limited and not overused. This result was consistent with the sequence found in using L1 in the Vietnam context.

The frequency with which teachers use Chinese depends on factors such as students' English proficiency, lesson objectives, and class durations. Teacher A said that because English is a foreign language for most Taiwanese, learning English words and grammar will be hard to understand if teachers only use English to teach primary school students. That is why the

teachers always use a lot of Chinese when teaching English in Taiwan. She added that if students' level is too low that they need help understanding even simple words, teachers must use Chinese to instruct the activities and give feedback. In contrast, teacher B said that to avoid using too much Chinese when giving instructions, she used gestures and simple words to clarify the activities' rules. To agree with teacher B, male teacher C mentioned that he only uses Chinese to describe some complicated activities' rules to make fair use of time.

All teachers who participated in the study admitted that they needed to use L1 to explain when teaching grammar points. Chinese is advantageous when explaining technical terms and complex grammatical structures, as it is easy for students to feel confused or misunderstood when only English is used (teacher B). Teacher A said that English grammar is different from Chinese grammar, making it clear using Chinese. In the interview, teacher C said that using L1 when teaching grammar will make the whole teaching process faster. Nevertheless, they added that they could use examples to explain grammar first.

Regarding telling the jokes, "Students should understand the joke, or it will not be a joke." said teacher C. Jokes relax students, so it should be in Chinese to let students get the jokes' meanings (teacher B). She also mentioned that Chinese cultures are distinct from American cultures, so the jokes should be Taiwanese jokes and presented in Chinese.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study demonstrated the potential usefulness of Chinese in various situations, such as explaining grammatical principles, assessing comprehension, and providing feedback to individuals. Nevertheless, when using Chinese in teaching English, teachers should control the frequency of using it during their lessons to make it not overused and effective. Because of time constraints, only ten teachers participated in this study; another research should be conducted with many participants to discover more reasons for using L1 in L2 teaching.

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