DOES USING CULTURALLY FAMILIAR TEXTS IN SECOND-LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS ENHANCE THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS?

[1]A.Aravinth Raja, [2]S. Prabahar

[1]Research Scholar, (Reg. No. 19114014011010), Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India.
[2]Professor, Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

The paper makes an effort to highlight the importance of adopting culturally familiar texts in second-language classrooms, particularly to assess learners' reading comprehension. The advent of cultural linguistics in the twenty-first century has demonstrated that language and cultural concepts are inextricably linked. This has demonstrated that language is seen as a socially developed cognitive function and that language studies have adopted this fundamental assumption of sociocultural theory and applied it to human language. The idea that word-to-word analysis is how reading is processed in the human brain has also been refuted by new studies. It is found that less attention is required when a reader is familiar with the material, and more attention is required when a reader is unfamiliar with the material. Emphasis is given to content and cultural familiarity.

Introduction

The rise of cultural linguistics in the twenty-first century has made the case that language and cultural conceptions are intertwined. According to cultural linguistics, second-language learners cannot fully understand the cultural ideas of other languages. In other words, learning a foreign language to fit into a person's local culture is not crucial because the native language and culture are intrinsically related. Professor and Chair of Cultural Linguistics at Monash University, Sharifian (2017) defines cultural linguistics as a multidisciplinary study that explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualization. He states that cultural linguistics "engages with features of human languages that encode or instantiate culturally constructed conceptualizations encompassing the whole range of human experience" (p. 2).

The phrase "cultural conceptualizations" refers to the cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and cultural experiences that humans conceptualize through their experiences and relationships with others. Individuals and their cultures both influences how they conceptualize or perceive other people. For instance, a person's experiences with a social event, such as a "wedding," and the shared cultural traditions of the group to which he belongs affect how that person perceives the social event. Both geographically and personally, this type of cultural cognition varies. For instance, Americans and Indians do not conceptualize "weddings" similarly. Two cultures have different concepts, which is why there is variety in the conceptualization.

The perception or conceptualization of phenomena that appear to be universal, such as colour, emotion, food, kinship, and social events, varies depending on a person's culture. So, the word green denotes "holiness" in one language (said by an Arab) and "envy" in another language (spoken by an English man). Therefore, an Englishman learning Arabic retains his conception of the colour green as jealousy, and it is impossible to predict that an Englishman speaking Arabic would use the term green to denote holiness. Similar to how an Arab native speaker could never fully identify the colour green with jealousy when learning English because his conception of green as holiness would conflict.

Sociocultural learning theory

Despite focusing primarily on cognitive growth and higher-order mental processes, Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural learning included no explicit mention of language learning or second language acquisition. Since meaning-making is regarded as a process related to language learning, second-language scholars adapted his ideas in the context of second-language learning since his theory concentrates on one of the higher-order mental processing, "meaning-making." According to Mahn (2013), only Vygotsky's hypothesis "examined the social origins of the ability of both the human species and individual to use language to communicate, as well as analyzing the origins and development of the internal mental systems that are necessary for and result from this communicative ability" (p. 3). His concept also emphasizes language use as a means of communication for interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. When a person uses their cognitive ability to understand the meaning of a discourse, the brain employs specific strategies to enable the interlocutor to comprehend the discourse. Vygotsky knows this process of creating meaning as znachenie slova. For Vygotsky, this means:

> A process that has its foundation in the infant's physical brain and in the elementary thinking process with which humans are born and which develop in infancy, such as mechanical memory, involuntary attention, and perception. These elementary mental functions are shaped by the sociocultural situation of development into which children are born and by their social interactions in those situations. An infant's developing perception, attention, and memory lead to communication between the child and caregivers, with the latter ascribing communicative intent to the infant's gestures and sounds. Through this early social interaction children develop communicative intentionality and the initial use of symbols to convey meaning—key elements in the acquisition of language. (Mahn, 2013, p. 3-4).

The meaning of discourse is always grasped through negotiation in such a meaning-making process. For instance, when an adult and a youngster speak, the child may not understand the exact meaning of the adult's words or sentences. This is due to the disparities between the background knowledge of adults and children. Even if the words are created using an identical sequence of sounds, the child's cognitive ability uses what the child already knows about the word to recover the meaning of the word. This is due to Vygotsky's (1987) observation that while children and adults perceive a word's form, they perceive a word's meaning differently. To make things easier, children and adults can comprehend how to pronounce a word, like "dog," because they associate the sound pattern with the same thing. However, one person imagines a dog in the abstract, while the other imagines a dog in

the concrete. He continues by explaining that the toddler's mental image of "dog" is tangible because, at some point, when a four-legged animal with a similar sound pattern was mentioned, the youngster internalized the meaning of the word. The child's cognitive abilities analyze the sound pattern and apply the particular sound pattern to the actual object "dog." When a youngster hears the term "dog" often later in the developing process, even when the concrete object is not in the immediate environment, the child knows that dog is an abstract concept unless there is a tangible object nearby (Vygotsky, 1987).

Human cognitive development is largely influenced by encounters with the social world, which causes the brain to internalize, apply, and occasionally reformulate previously acquired knowledge. The alteration of natural capacities once they come into contact with socioculturally built mediational tools is how development takes place, according to Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995). According to Lantolf and Thorne (2000), participation in institutional contexts like education organized sports, and workplaces, as well as cultural, linguistic, and historically established settings like family life and peer group contact, among others, facilitates the developing process. As a result, Leo Vygotsky's sociocultural theory postulates that cognitive growth is only tied to how humans interact with the outside world, particularly how their immediate circumstances impact it, and is unrelated to anything biological. In other words, if a person is born and raised in a specific cultural group, the common knowledge of that particular cultural group will naturally influence his cognitive development.

According to the theory of cognitive growth, people internalize, appropriate, and reformulate their prior knowledge whenever they come across new information concerning an aspect of it. Because of this, the underlying tenet of the sociocultural theory is that "sociocultural and mental activity are bound together in a dependent, symbolically mediated relationship." (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 1995, p. 109).

Given that language is regarded as a socially formed cognitive function, language studies have used this core assumption of sociocultural theory and applied it to human language. The results showed that people use language to store concepts in their memories and recall them from memory (Gathercole and Baddeley, 1993). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that individuals use their native tongue to preserve ideas or meanings in their memory. As a result, even with their best efforts, people who try to learn a second language find it difficult because their brains do not readily accept their attempts to link certain sounds in the second language with certain concepts. Instead, the brain communicates that the idea has been connected to a different sound pattern in memory. This is among the critical causes cited by various language education researchers who study how learning a second language is hindered by the native tongue. For instance, a study conducted by Lantolf and Thorne (2000) found that "our first language is used not only for communicative interaction but also to regulate our cognitive processes, it stands to reason that learners must necessarily rely on this language in order to mediate their learning of the L2" (p. 215). The child already has a system of meanings in the native language when he starts learning a foreign language, according to Vygotsky (1987).

According to sociocultural theory, communication on both the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels is crucial for cognitive growth. The phenomenon of using language to store and retrieve concepts is known as private speech in the context of language teaching (Kohlberg et al., 1968). Given the terms "private speech" and "sociocultural theory,"

numerous studies have been conducted to determine the function of private speech in the acquisition of first and second languages (Frawley and Lantolf, 1985; Diaz & Berk, 1992; Wertsch, 1985). The interference of L1 in L2 learning, according to research, is limited in form but limitless in meaning. According to a study by Lantolf and Thorne (2000), L1 meanings continue to have a widespread effect on L2 learning, even while L1 forms may have a limited effect on L2 learning.

Psycholinguistic model of reading

According to Miller (1964; 1965), the psycholinguistic model of reading explains the psychological process involved in reading. Kenneth Goodman is the first to recognize the reader's essential role in the reading process. He (1967) states that comprehension takes place while the "reader reconstructs, as best as he can, a message which a writer has encoded as a graphic display" (p. 135). As a result, according to Goodman (p. 135), reading is a "psycholinguistic guessing game" on the reader's part. In other words, the reader's cognitive abilities are crucial for language understanding. In his (1973b) research, he goes on to explain the crucial role of the reader, saying:

> …the reader does not use all the information available to him. Reading is a process in which the reader picks and chooses from the available information only enough to select and predict a language structure which is decodable. It is not in any sense a precise perceptual process. (p. 164)

James Coady, a renowned psycholinguistics researcher, expanded on Goodman's findings and created a new psycholinguistic model of reading from the viewpoint of second language learners. In his essay from 1979, "A Psycholinguistic model of the ESL Reader," he links this model to pupils learning English as a second language. According to him, second language learners "view reading as essentially consisting of a more or less successful interaction among three factors: higher-level conceptual abilities, background knowledge, and process strategies" (pp. 6-7).

James Coady was the first to recognize the impact of readers' prior knowledge on comprehension in psycholinguistic models of reading. In a relatively short period, his concept became highly well-liked, particularly in the ESL teaching paradigm. His idea that a "fluent reader approaches a text with expectancies based upon his knowledge of the subject" (Coady, 1979, p. 6) received widespread recognition in second language teaching. However, new studies have disproved the theory that word-to-word analysis is how reading is processed in the human brain. For instance, Smith (1971) contends that reading words or letters sequentially harms the reading process since it causes one word's meaning to be lost before moving on to the next. He claimed that comprehension is impossible in this situation because the brain does not connect the words on a printed page. According to Smith and Goodman (1971)

> it is becoming clear that reading is not a process of combining individual letters into words, and strings of words into sentences, from which meaning springs automatically. Rather the evidence is that deep level process of identifying meaning either precedes or makes unnecessary the process of identifying individual words. (p. 179)

According to Pearson's (1976) research, readers' attention to the visual information on a page fluctuates depending on the content. He discovered that when a reader is familiar with the material, less attention is needed, and when a reader is unfamiliar with the material, more attention is needed. Thus, Pearson (1976) puts it that "familiarity with the content helps to explain why one can read Time Magazine much more rapidly than a philosophical treatise" (p. 310).

Source-cultural texts:

Countries like Japan, Venezuela, China, and Kuwait were concerned that teaching English as a second language and its cultural values would cause students to forget their cultural values. These nations were also concerned that students might become accustomed to Anglo-American cultural values. Other countries that taught their students English as a second language likewise feared that these teaching strategies would encourage acculturation and threaten their sense of national identity. According to the education ministries of various nations, ESL training materials should "de-Anglo-Americanize" (Cem and Alptekin, 1984) in both language and cultural terms. For instance, Japan and Venezuela preferred to teach English by removing the English culture that was ingrained in it (Nakayama, 1982; Thomas, 1983). According to Hajjaj (1981), Kuwait created English-language teaching resources "with the Kuwaiti situation in mind," and China created EFL materials by redesigning existing materials and incorporating Chinese norms and values (Scott, 1980). Such nativization of ESL materials was practised in some nations that strongly opposed teaching English culture alongside English language instruction.

Additionally, Alptekin (2002) asserted that as English has become an international tongue, the promotion of "native-like competency" must be avoided in teaching English as a second language. According to him, the standards of British politeness or American informality are meaningless because "a large portion of the world uses English for instrumental reasons such as professional interactions, academic study, and commercial endeavours" (cited in Genc and Bada, 2005, p. 76). Similarly, Smith (1976) asserted that as English has become a global language, it has also inevitably lost its national identity. Therefore, L2 speakers do not have to internalize native speakers' cultural norms.

Conclusion:

Social interactions significantly impact human cognitive growth because they force the brain to assimilate, apply, and occasionally reformulate previously learned information. In this situation, using learning materials specific to the

student's culture can make learning easier. When delivering teaching materials in the classroom, familiarity is a component to consider because it is clear that when a reader is familiar with the subject, less attention is required, and when a reader is unfamiliar with the material, more attention is required. Familiarity with the content and culture of materials used in a second-language classroom can facilitate learning.

References:

1. Alptekin, C. (2002). Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT. *ELT Journal 56*(1), 57-64.

2. Cem, A., & Alptekin, M. (1984). The question of culture: EFL teaching in non-English-speaking countries. *ELT Journal Volume, 38*(1), 14-20.

3. Coady, J. (1979). A psycholinguistic model of the ESL reader. In R. Mackay., B. Barkman., & R. R. Jordan (Eds.), *Reading in a second language: Hypotheses, organization and practice* (pp. 5-12). Newbury House Publishers.

4. Diaz, R. M., & Berk, L. E. (Eds.). (1992). *Private Speech: From Social Interaction To Self-regulation*. Psychology Press.

5. Frawley, W., & Lantolf, J. (1985). Second language discourse: A Vygotskyan perspective. *Applied Linguistics, 6*, 19–44. Penguin Books.

6. Gathercole, S. E., & Baddeley, A. D. (1993). *Working memory and language.* Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315804682

7. Genc, B., & Bada, E. (2005). Culture in language learning and teaching. *The Reading Matrix, 5*(1), 73-80.

8. Goodman, K. S. (1967). Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. *Journal of the Reading Specialist, 6*(1), 126-135.

9. Goodman, K. S. (1973b). Analysis of oral reading miscues: Applied psycholinguistics. In Frank Smith (Ed.), *Psycholinguistics and reading,* (pp. 158-176). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

10. Hajjaj, A. S. (1981). English language teaching in Kuwait. *Teaching English Abroad Newsletter.*

11. Kohlberg, L., Yaeger, J., & Hjertholm, E. (1968). Private speech: Four studies and a review of theories. *Child Development, 39*(3), 691–736. https://doi.org/10.2307/1126979

12. Lantolf, J. P., & Pavlenko, A. (1995). Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 15,* 108-124.

13. Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2000). In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 197–221). essay, Oxford University Press.

14. Mahn, H. (2013). Vygotsky and second language acquisition. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 1–8). essay, Blackwell Publishing.

15. Miller, G. A. (1964). The psycholinguistics. *Encounter, 23,* 29-37.

16. Miller, G. A. (1965). Some preliminaries to psycholinguistics. *American Psychologist, 20,* 15-20.

17. Nakayama, Y. (1982). International English for Japanese people: Suggesting multinationalization. *TESL Reporter, 15*(4), 63-72.

18. Pearson, P. D. (1976). A psycholinguistic model of reading. *Language Arts, 53*(3), 309-314. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41404152

19. Scott, C. S. (1980). Some first impressions of EFL teaching in China. *TESOL Newsletter, 14*(6), 11-34.

20. Sharifian, F. (2017). *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural conceptualisations and language.* John Benjamins Publishing Company.

21. Smith, F. (1971). *Understanding reading: A psycholinguistic analysis of reading and learning to read.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

22. Smith, L. E. (1976). English as an international auxiliary language. *RELC Journal, 7*(2), 38-42. https://doi.org/10.1177/003368827600700205

23. Smith, F., & Goodman, K. S. (1971). On the psycholinguistic method of teaching reading. *The Elementary School Journal, 71*(4), 177-181. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1000548

24. Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics, 4*(2), 91-112. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91

25. Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

26. Wertsch, J. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Harvard University Press.