



Using Bilingual Method In Esl Classrooms: Advantages And Challenges

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APA Citation:

Mustafa, A.M., Ahamed, S.K., (2021). Using Bilingual Method In Esl Classrooms: Advantages And Challenges, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 2182-2185; 2021.

Submission Date: 10/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 15/12/2021

Abstract

According to Research done in Academics, Linguists have established that there is no one single ideal Method for all and for varied situations in an ESL classroom. It has also been established that no Method is superior or inferior to other Methods. It is not always appropriate to apply the same Method to all types of Learners who have Different Abilities, Objectives and Learning Needs. An ESL Classroom is where the Teachers have to deal with Students with varied interests. It is the moral responsibility of the Teacher to ensure that all his / her Students receive what they deserve inside the classroom. This study aims at discussing the pros and cons of using the Bilingual Method in an ESL Classroom with a special reference to its impact on pronunciation.

Keywords: Bilingualism, ESL Classroom, Pronunciation, Methods, Teachers, Learners.

INTRODUCTION

A thoughtful Teacher has to be familiar with the available Methods of teaching English where as others ask for invention of new Methods and Techniques. Reassessment and Introspection of Teaching Methods by self is worth the time. Several significant and indispensable Methods are listed below as per the chronological order of their development.

- Grammar Translation Method.
- Direct Method.
- Audio-lingual Method.
- The Structural Approach.

New methods have also come into existence and disseminating influence in big ways. Task-based Approach, Project-based Approach, Lexical Syllabus and using Smart Phones in Classrooms are a few among them.

The Bilingual Methods of Teaching ESL was first developed by C.J. Dodson in 1967. The Method is a revolutionary one where both L1 (Mother Tongue) and L2 (Target Language) are involved. In other words, L1 is used to achieve proficiency in L2. The Method is driven by the principles of similarities and differences that are found between the two Languages. The similarities and differences may be pertaining to situation, sound system, vocabulary structure etc. When the Learner and the Teacher understand these nuances, the learning of L2 is greatly facilitated. The method is also driven by other principles as follows:

- The understanding of words and sentences in Foreign Languages can be made easier by the use of L1.
- It is waste of time to create artificial situations to explain the meaning of words and sentences of the L2.
- The saved time may be utilized for practice in sentence patterns of L2.

Employing the Bilingual Method in ESL classrooms may be done in three ways.

i. By using what is useful: ‘Knowing the audience’ is the first rule of teaching. Slavish conformance to a system that is not most effective tool for the context, environment and Students can be avoided. Adapting useful means, rejecting useless ones and adding what is our uniqueness may be greatly helpful.

ii. By using the Sandwich Technique: The first step of this technique is to introduce a word or phrase in L2. The next step is to give the idiomatic meaning in L1. Repeat the new word or phrase in L2. With this technique, the meaning is conveyed quickly. Negative Transfer (interference from the L1) is overlooked as the Students have to concentrate on repeating the L1 Word or Phrase correctly.

iii. By combining written and oral exercises:

There is no doubt that the importance of attaining oral fluency is in the central place in the process of learning a new Language. However, Students should be given opportunities to refer to written texts in L2 while practising dialogues. Subsequently opportunities to role-play to improve around the language structures covered.

Bilingual method is worth giving a try in ESL classrooms as it has lot to offer for thoughtful Teachers and Students alike.

The above points have corroborated the point that the features of what has come to be known as the three Ps of the Bilingual Method viz. Present, Practice and Produce. It should not be assumed out of the blue that being bilingual benefits one's cognitive development in every way. Or, more broadly, it is important to understand what types of cognitive domains we might find bilingual advantage in rather than just asserting that bilinguals or monolinguals have an edge over one another (and this eventually leads to the discussion of the efficiency of bilingual education programs). The acquisition of oral language by young children and the later development of their linguistic abilities have been found to be related.

The Bilingual Method actually has considerable advantages to offer to both the Teachers and Students. Several advantages of the Method are as follows:

i. Students become absolute Bilinguals and this positive outcome is evident from the very beginning of the learning process. The destination of the student's journey (i.e. to become fully bilingual or multilingual) is tangible in their Language Teacher. The ability of the Teacher moving from L1 to L2 and coming back is a perfect model for the student to follow.

- ii. The Students will never miss out on a lesson. As the Teacher sandwiches L2 between two layers of L1, the Students happen to be very attentive and the monotony is got rid of. The advocates of the Bilingual Method firmly believe that the Method is not a hindrance as it helps captivating the attention of the Students in an ESL classroom. It also helps the student understanding the context very well.
- iii. Many Teachers who handle ESL classrooms often complain that they do not get the respect they deserve or the respect other Teachers were able to get. The condition of the Teachers who hit on exotic shores with a fresh TEFL or IELTS certificates is more pathetic. But the Bilingual Method instils concrete thoughts in the minds of the Students that the Teacher is one among them. Hence the Method helps the Teachers to get the deserved respect and to maintain discipline thereby.
- iv. Though the Bilingual Method uses the L1 of the student, it is the Teacher who uses it predominantly inside the classroom. This carves out a clear distinction between it and the Grammar Translation Method. The GT Method relies more on rote learning and the translation of the texts. Hence, the Bilingual Method proves to be tool to the Teacher which does not hinder the L2 development and actually fosters it.
- v. A lot of time is saved using the Bilingual Method in the ESL classroom. The learning process is made easier as complex things are explained easily in L1. The saved time can be used to get proper training in different skills. It also helps building strong foundations for reading right from the beginning. The already acquired skills in L1 are made good use of in developing fluency and accuracy in L2.

Though the bilingual method has much advantages, the limitations of the Method cannot be kept aside. In the meantime, a sensible Teacher could convert these challenges into opportunities.

- i. Bilingualism has an impact on how well pupils pronounce English.
- ii. When it comes to learning English pronunciation, bilinguals and monolinguals have very different learning styles.
- iii. The existing English words and sounds in bilinguals' first language (L1) have a significant impact on the development of their English pronunciation.
- iv. The Teacher needs to be a bilingual in both the Native Language and the Target Language. This pre-requisite has implications in manyfold. The Teacher who shares the same L1 among the Students hardly face any difficulties for they have to be mandatorily proficient in L2. However, Teachers who pursue their career in a non-English speaking Country as 'fresh-off-the-boat' Teacher has to become familiar with the local language. Whereas those who are engaged in TESL in their own English-Speaking Country may try to learn the complexities of the language of the immigrant community. This provides a mutual empathy between the Students and the Teacher. The Students realize the efforts taken by the Teacher to learn their language and the vice-versa.
- v. There is an imminent threat that the students may become over reliant on their L1. It may lead to a bad habit of filtering through the L1. This must be avoided and the students should understand that L2 Learning is something more than the substitutions. The Teacher can ensure this with meticulous planning and preparation.
- vi. Other challenges include the diversion of attention among Students, selective attention from Students etc.

Conclusion:

Among the three widely recognized Methods of teaching a language viz. the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method and the Bilingual Method, the Bilingual Method is the least considered one. Though the Method has much to offer to both Teachers and Students alike, it is overlooked by citing a handful of limitations. The Method helps the process of learning a New Language to a greater extent by saving much time. The saved time can be used for training in other domains of the learning process. It is all in the hands of the Teacher who is capable of converting the hindrances into milestones. A sensible Teacher will always look to cater to the needs of all Students. Such Teacher will never miss a chance to give a try to this Method. Empathy, that too, mutual empathy is one of the best outcomes of this Method. When the Teacher and the student understand one another and recognize their efforts mutually the learning process becomes an enjoyable one. The need for the prompt usage of the Methods in this connection should be considered. The learning a Foreign Language could not be done overlooking the Pronunciation part of it. By any means the learner should attain proficiency of the FL along with the attainment of the Target Pronunciation. It must be ensured no overlooking of the influences of other Methods and the impact/influence on the target pronunciation takes place.

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