The Use of First Language in Teaching Second Language Vocabulary to Sri Lankan Undergraduates.

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Abstract— English has become the "Global language" (Crystal, 2003) and is taught as the second language in most of the countries around the world. In Sri Lanka too, there is a considerable demand for English Language Teaching (ELT). The research is based on teaching English vocabulary to undergraduates who are non-native speakers of English.

Since majority of the degree programmes are conducted in the medium of English in Sri Lanka, universities take measures to provide language support by conducting English language classes. In the process of teaching English to students of various language capacities, the interference of first language (L1) in teaching second language (L2) could occur in many ways and in many areas. Thus the aim of the research was to find whether the use of L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary hinders the students' ability in improving their L2 vocabulary.

Fifty first year students and five lecturers of a leading Sri Lankan university were taken as the sample group and the students were put into two groups where one was exposed to L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary. The students were given a pre-test and a post-test where the marks obtained were compared. They were also administered a questionnaire to collect background information. The lecturers were interviewed and their experiences and ideas regarding teaching university students were gathered.

It was found that the students who were exposed to L1 did not show considerable difference in scores including some showing a little decrease in marks whereas the students who were not exposed to L1 showed a remarkable increase in obtaining marks. So it was noted that the use of L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary to university students hinders their ability in improving L2 vocabulary. It was also found that the lecturers use L1 at times in explaining the most difficult vocabulary related to the field of study of the students.

Keywords— **ELT, hinders L1, L2, non-native speaker**

I. INTRODUCTION

English occupies a pivotal role in today's world. It has been referred to as the world langage or 'lingua franca' as it is widely spoken. It has been globally dispersed and has become the prominent medium of international discourse in many regions. It is widely learned as a second language and used as an official language of the European Union and many Commonwealth countries. It is the third mostly spoken language in the world, afer Manderin Chinese and Spanish (Crystal,1998).

English is used and taught as a foreign language in many countries. Linguists believe that it is no longer the exclusive cultural property of the Native English Speakers. It is a well known fact that it is a language that is absorbing aspects of culture worldwide as it continues to grow. The increasing use of the English language globally has had a large impact on many other languages, leading to language shift and even death. For this reason, the English language is considered to be forever evolving.

The interfernce of the mother tongue in teaching English as a second language could happen at any level of English Language Teaching (ELT). The aim of the research was to find out whether the use of first language (L1) in teaching second language (L2) vocabulary to undergraduates of Management hinders their ability to improve L2 vocabulary. The tatget group was taught Business Communication; English related to management, business and commerce. Another objective was to findout whether L1 is often used in teaching L2 vocabulary. If so, Direct L1 word, L1 definition and L1 expalnation were assumed to be involved when using L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary.

Thus the research focused on "when teaching L2, in what areas is L1 used?" and the hypothesis was the "Use of L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary to Sri Lankan undergraduates hinders their ability to improve L2 vocabulary".

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the influence of behaviouristic psychology, language learning was seen as a setting up of the habitual behaviour specific to it. According to Koekkoek (1970), "the habits already established for the first language were seen as a source of interference". Together with the second language acquisition which could happen anywhere in the society, the habits of the first language transfers to people. Ray Graham (1984) explains how children acquire the language outside the school without any guidance by any teacher but find difficulties when it comes to teaching it inside a classroom. The reason he presents is the fact that language teaching is highlighted as a subject in schools.

"Problem with language teaching in the public schools is that language is seen first and foremost as a subject to be taught rather than as a medium through which to communicate" (Graham, 1984). The belief that babies and children pick up the mother tongue with great ease than "adults struggle ineffectively with a new language to impose on it the phonology and syntax of their mother tongue" (Macnamara, 1976) becomes significant in this aspect.

Watcharapunyawong & Usaha (2013) states that "L1 interference occurs when L2 learners transfer their own systematic knowledge into the use of the target language". Language interference is also defined as a "cross-linguistic and language transfer which happens in the productive skills like speaking and writing" (Hashim, 1999).

Many researches have been done on L1 interference in L2 learning. Chan (2004) investigated the evidence of syntactic transfer from Chinese to English. 710 Chinese students were given 2 tasks; to translate English sentences and to correct 20 ungrammatically written English sentences into L1. The first language interference was focused on 5 Categories namely copula control, adverb placement, inability to use 'there is', failure to use relative clauses and the confusion in verb transitivity.

Two outstanding researches are being done to observe L1 interference in L2 writing of the Thai students. Bennui (2008) in his study of L1 interference in the writing of Thai EFL students, reveals 3 main categories of first language interference.
1. L1 Lexical Interference: happens due to lack of lexical competence. Since the vocabulary levels of two languages are different, when writing or speaking L2, direct translation of L1 comes leading to make errors in word choice.
2. L1 syntactic interference: related to grammar errors. This type of interference is seen in 7 categories.

i. Word order	ii.Subject-verb agreement
iii. Tense	
iv.The infinitive	v. Verb "have"
vi. Prepositions	vii. Noun determiners

3. L1 discourse interference: happens due to difference between styles of L1 and L2 text formats including text formats, essay patterns, organization and concepts.

Watcharapunyawong & Usaha (2013) have done a research with 40 second year EFL undergraduates at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Thepsatri Rajabhat University, Thailand, with the purpose of investigating Thai EFL students' writing errors in different text types. The students were asked to write 3 paragraphs of 150 words each in 3 genres; narration, description and comparison/contrast. After analysing the writing errors with the supervision of 3 language experts, sixteen L1 interference categories were found. Out of the sixteen, verb-tense is the most frequent error found in narrative writing whereas article error was the most found error in descriptive writing. It is stated that singular/plural form errors are the most frequent in comparison/contrast writing.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The research took an experimental research design. Random sampling method was used to select fifty first year undergraduates and five Elnglish language lecturers. The undergraduates belonged to two English Groups; each containig 25. The five lecturers were randomly selected among those who taught the same English programme and their university teaching experience varied from 2-10 years.

The survey types were questionnaires, pre and post tests and interviews. The students were given a pre and a post evaluation on vocabulary related to business communication. Students of one class (experimental group) were exposed to first language in teaching second language vocabulary whereas the other group (control group) wasn't exposed to first language in teaching second language vocabulary. After a semester of teaching, their vocabulary performance was analyzed. They were also administered to a questionnaire to collect their views and ideas on second language learning at tertiary level. And also the socio-demographic details such as family background, schools attended for primary and secondary education and the professional qualifications obtained with regard to the target language were taken note of.

Five lecturers who conducted the same English programme were interviewed in order to gather their experience and ideas of using first language in teaching second language vocabulary for undergraduates. As ethical consideration, the research did not have any impact on the examination results of the common degree programme of the target group as the pre tests and post tests were conducted apart from the end semester examinations and assessments of the degree programme.

V. BACKGROUND OF THE TARGET GROUP

The target group consisted of 50 first year management students who were non native speakers of English. It included 43 native speakers of Sinhala and 7 native speakers of Tamil. Everybody in the target group had done their secondary education in Sinhala Medium and had attended state schools including, National, Central and Popular scholls. All of them were reading for the same degree at the University. They belonged to various provinces of Sri Lanka but the majority of the target group was from the western province.

General Certificate of Education (GCE) advanced level (A/L) is the highest and final level of qualification a student could obtain at the secondary level education in Sri Lanka. Since education is free in the country, GCE (A/L) is highly competitive as it ranks the students for free university education at tertiary level. The grading system grades the students as follows.

A	75 - 100
B	65 - 74
C	55 - 64
S	35 - 54
W	0 – 34

Thus with regard to the English performanc of the target group at GCE (A/L), 8 have got credit (C) passes 22 have got simple (S) passes whereas 20 have failed with (W) passes. None of them have obtained either A or a B pass.
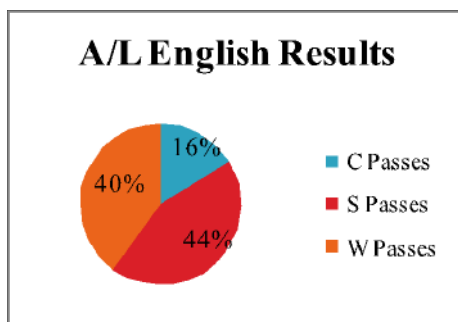

Figure 1: Advanced Level English Results

As for the highest qualification of English of the target group, 18 students said that it was General Certificate of Education- Ordinary Level (GCE- O/L) English whereas 24 students stated that it was A/L General English and 8
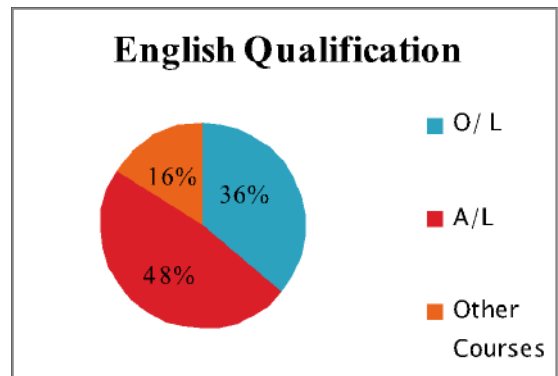

Figure 2: Qualifications in English

students said its neither O/L or A/L but its other courses they have sucessfully completed after O/L or A/L.

Regarding the view point of the Medium of Degree Programmes at University level, 18 students said that it should be English, 26 students said it has to be English eventhough it is hard for them to follow, 4 students said it should be Sinhala for the students with language difficulties and 2 students were of no idea.

VI. Evaluation of the Pre-Test and the Post-Test (Experimental Group)
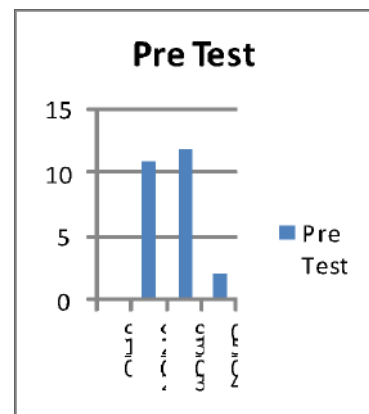

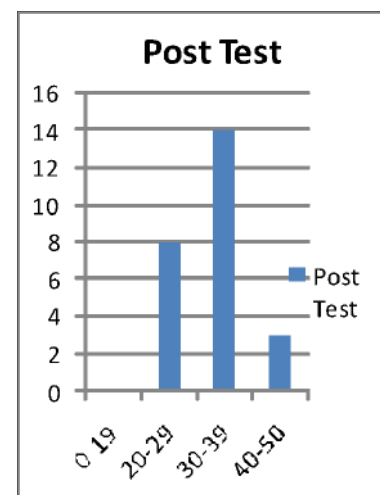Figure 3: Evaluation of pre-test of Experimental Group

Figure 4: Evaluation of the post-test of Experimental Group

In the pre-test, no student scored between 0-19 but 11 scored between 20-29, 12 which marked the majority scored 30-30 and 2 students scored 40-50. On the other hand, in the post test, no student scored between 0-19. It was notable that 20-29 category has declined to 8 students and 30-39 category had 14 students whereas 40-50 category consisted of 3 students.

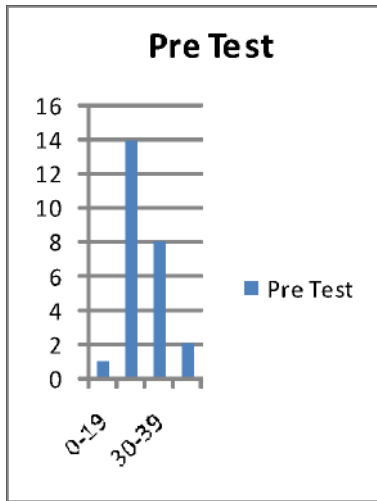## VII.   Evaluation of the Pre-Test and the Post-Test (Control Group)

Figure 5: Evaluation of pre-test of Control Group

In the pre-test 1 student has scored between 0-19 and 14 studetns which marked the majority has scored 20-29, 8 students have scored 30-39 and 2 students have scored 40-50. In the post-test, nobody scored between 0-19, 5 students scored between 20-29, 15 studetns scored between 30-39 and 5 studetns scored 40-50.
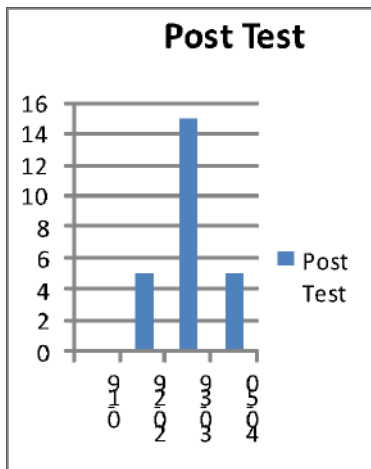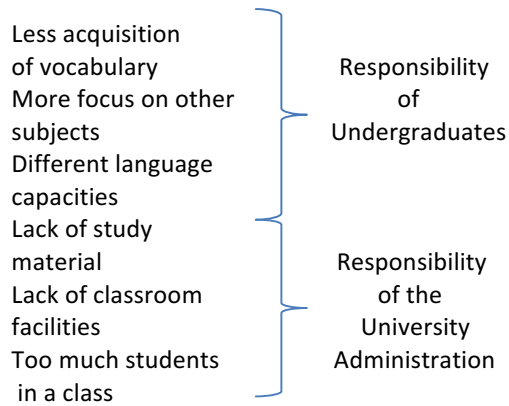

Figure 6: Evaluation of post-test of Control Group

VIII.   Facilitator Perspective of the Issue

The interviews held with the 5 English language lecturers revealed that the lecturers face difficulties in teaching not only the second language vocabulary but also the other aspects of English to undergraduates. Their categorization of the reasons and causes of the teaching difficulties are as follows.

Less acquisition of vocabulary
More focus on other subjects
Different language capacities
} Responsibility of Undergraduates

Lack of study material
Lack of classroom facilities
Too much students in a class
} Responsibility of the University Administration

The most interesting features in teaching English to undergraduates according to the lectuerers are mentioned below.

- Students' interest in group activities
- Student motivation and curiosity about the language
- Learner friendly classrooms with language teaching facilities
- Student centered and activity based curriculum

IX.   Discussion

It was found that the language lecturers use first language (L1) in teaching second language (L2) vocabulary in the form of L1 explanations and direct L1 words. They find it 'practical' to use L1 explanation rather than using L2 definition or L2 explanations.

It was also found that the undergraduates at the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce are taught Business Communication; English related to business, finance, modern technology and commerce. The course is compulsory for the first year management students to get exposed to a vast area of English vocabulary related to their stream of study.

Even though the medium of the degree programmes at the FMSC is English, the target group finds difficulties to follow their studies in English. The reason for this is that they have done their primary and secondary education in the Sinhala medium and they find it hard to follow higher and advanced studies in English because their exposure to English language is low.

75% of the target group has failed G.C.E (A/L) General English and it was revealed that English language has been neglected and ignored throughout their education process. The aim of the target group had been to obtain 3 A passes for their main subjects, which were the subjects related to commerce stream, at the GCE (A/L). The target group has been successful in the task as they have passed A/L's with high ranking scores so that they could enter university. But 40% of the target group has failed A/L General English due to the ignorance of the subject and less focus paid to the subject.

Yet 90% of the target group is of the opinion that the medium of their degree programme should be English and they are in need of the language ability and fluency and wish to improve English through the English programme of the university. 80% of the target group is of the viewpoint that the English programme conducted by the university is useful in improving the skills related to English and it suits the academic environment as beginners. 20% state that the skills related to listening should also be given a similar attention in syllabus development.

75% of the target group was familiar with the vocabulary related to commerce and finance. ¾ of the target group has obtained full marks for the vocabulary exercises related to commerce at the pre and post evaluations. Their comprehension related to modern technology and new business trends were comparatively low and it was only 50% of the target group which showed a considerable comprehension in exercises related to the above areas. Thus the target group marked a lack of exposure and a low proficiency level in vocabulary related to novelties in technology and business. It also marked their failure in updating knowledge on novelties of technology and business.

Regarding the comparison of the two groups, the experimental group which was exposed to L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary, did not show a considerable improvement in obtaining marks for the post evaluation paper whereas the control group, which wasn't exposed to L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary showed an improvement in post evaluation scores.

Thus the progress of the target group which wasn't exposed to L1 was notable. Both charts show a good distribution indicating required standard of undergraduate test papers.

X.   Conclusion

Thus the hypothesis; "Use of L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary to undergraduates hinders their ability to improve L2 vocabulary" was proven through the findings. The English Lecturers who teach the management students use L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary as it is required by the students because the students are not of good competency levels and they need the L1 support in acquiring L2 vocabulary.

Implementation of some suggestions could minimize the hindrance of the students' ability in improving L2 vocabulary. The lecturers could use the L2 explanations than giving direct L1 word and L1 explanations. They could use strategies in explaining like giving L2 synonyms and dictionary meaning.

It could be concluded with the note that the undergraduates have realized the value and importance of English in their academic and future endeavours and are keen to improve the skills related to English language. And also the English language proficiency and related skills could be stimulated, inculcated and enhanced through effective teaching methodology and the L2 vocabulary enhancement could be done vastly through the exposure to the L2 vocabulary itself.

XI.   Recommendations

It is important that the students learn dictionary skills. Therefore language lecturers could introduce a lesson on 'dictionary skills' and could introduce a 'thesaurus' so that the undergraduates will not totally depend on the lecturer in finding difficult vocabulary.

The undergraduates should be encouraged to read English newspapers. Newspaper reading sessions and activities related to newspaper reading could be organized in English lectures. This would enhance their vocabulary related to modern technology, new business trends and current issues.

Lecturers should encourage the students to talk in English. This could be implemented by persuading them to ask questions from the lecturer in English where phrases of appreciation could be used as encouragement.

Since the syllabus lacks listening activities, the English language syllabus could be introduced with subject related listening activities. Undergraduates would also get an exposure to good pronunciation and they could concentrate on their pronunciation as well.

Short entertainment sessions should also be introduced to English lectures. This could be done as ice breakers or short lessons on English songs where students could engage in various learning activities while listening. It will keep undergraduates apace with vocabulary on current trends in entertainment and will also broaden their understanding. These measures will not only help the undergraduates improve L2 vocabulary, but also they will become 'added values' to their lives as well.

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