ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of language teaching, the role of translation and first language (L1) has been prominent and inevitable. In fact, they played a significant role in one of the most dominant teaching methods known as grammar translation method (GTM). Though the gradual development and evolution of teaching methods and approaches in the field of ELT has relocated their role in teaching foreign and second languages, many ELT practitioners in Bangladesh are found to express their preference for and fascination over the use of translation and L1 in language teaching. This paper sketches the topsy-turvy journey of translation and L1 throughout different methods and approaches used in language education, their place in bilingual models of education, actual practices in Bangladeshi classrooms regarding their use, and their revived role in translanguaging literature. The paper argues how translation and L1 can be utilized to the fullest of its potentiality through translanguaging practices that call for reviewing the existing approaches and methods of language teaching and challenge them adopting a fluid, instead of a fixed, notion of language.

Keywords: Translation, L2/FL, teaching methods, bilingualism, translanguaging

Introduction

In second or foreign language (L2 or FL) education, translation is considered a tool or medium, not a skill, for teaching and learning languages. The approach toward translation while teaching a L2 or FL has experienced diverse kinds of treatment by language educators. Their notion toward translation has been directly and indirectly reflected in different teaching approaches and methods throughout the history of language education. However, any attempt of educating learners into a L2 or FL can be regarded as producing bilingual individuals of some kind. Hence, varying attitudes
towards translation are exhibited through different kinds of bilingual educational models as well.

The presence of English in Bangladesh has been as old as 1651 AD (Banglapedia, 2014). It has evolved through different turns and twists of history enjoying the status of a L2 sometimes, and FL on other occasions. Several changes in English language educational policy, curriculum, methods and materials have also affected the approach towards English to varying degrees, often rather unsuccessfully. Ambivalent attitude toward translation; its positioning in different language teaching approaches and methods; the usual presence, role and importance of translation in language classroom; and their appreciation through the language teaching theories practiced in the local contexts are presented in the paper linking each of the above issues to each of them to derive at the conclusion that the issue of translation has not been addressed properly in language teaching in Bangladesh. To add fuel to the fire, discussions on translingual practices and pedagogies are presented, in the light of which, the findings from the conclusion are critically interpreted for deeper understanding of the issue.

Notion towards translation/use of two languages

Translation has been approached in different ways throughout the course of history. Its role is appreciated e.g., in Grammar-translation Method, while its inclusion in teaching is often criticized. Gatenby (1948/1967) criticizes the incorporation of translation and says,

What should be avoided at all costs […] is translation as an exercise, oral or written. Why use two languages when the time allocated for learning is so short? . . . Translation may give meaning, but it does not teach. It perpetuates the time-wasting habit of always associating the new language with the old, and it actually hinders full comprehension.

(pp. 69-70)

Translation is a bilingual process and the aim of teaching FL or L2 is to capacitate bilingualism. Haugen (1953) rather presents a simplistic definition of a bilingual person and argued that anyone who can produce meaningful utterances in more than one language can be considered bilingual. However, different types of bilinguals have been theorized and differences between the compound, coordinate and subordinate bilinguals have been highlighted (Hamers & Blanc, 1989; Heredia & Cieslicka, 2014; Moradi, 2014; Weinrich, 1953). Compound bilinguals have competence in two different linguistic codes, with one system of meaning for words whereas coordinate bilinguals have competence in two different linguistics codes with two
different systems of meaning for words. Finally, subordinate bilinguals have competence in linguistic code of L2 via L1. Here, the learner learns L2 or other languages solely through a translation of L1. These three types of bilinguals show the role of context in L2 acquisition. More diverse learning contexts maximize the possibility of better bilingualism (Heredia & Cieslicka, 2014). According to Paradis (1977, 1978), the coordinate bilingual possesses the ability to be a native language speaker of both the languages whereas both the compound and subordinate bilinguals lack such possibility because the earlier one has separate codes and meaning system whereas the latter one has merged her meaning system and the latest one counts on L1 based meaning system for encountering her L2 challenges. While defining subordinate bilingual, Li (2000) says that a subordinate bilingual is “[a]n individual who exhibits interference in his or her language usage by reducing the patterns of the second language to those of the first” (pp. 6-7). Translation, when used in teaching L2 or FL in a foreign language setting like Bangladesh and if used properly in the above-mentioned sense, is most likely to produce subordinate bilingual. In such settings, it seems hard to be optimistic about the producing the other two kinds of bilinguals due to meagre contextual support and exposure.

In the above discussion, L1 and L2 have been seen as different and fixed systems of languages but language is approached in more dynamic ways nowadays. Shohamy (2006) finds language to be more ‘dynamic, energetic, evolving and fluid’, and comments,

If language is viewed in such dynamic terms, languages cannot be viewed as fixed and closed systems capable of being placed in closed boxes. Such fixity is in opposition to the notion of languages as living and dynamic organisms resulting from interactions and the effects of a variety of factors (Shohamy, 2006, p.10).

Pennycook (2004) says that “... the moment has arrived to argue that the language concept too has served its time” and that the “... over-determined sense of linguistic fixity, with its long ties to colonialism and linguistics needs to be profoundly questioned” (p. 2). Khubchandani (1997) criticizes the view that considers “languages” as being fixed entities and denies the contexts where fluid nature of language equals “an organic phenomenon”. He refers to India where one language merges into another and users of languages are hardly aware of where one language ends and merges and where another one begins.
Because of technological advancement, and globalization, people’s mobility has increased. Blommaert (2010), in this regard argues, saying that it has become obvious “...that the mobility of people also involves the mobility of linguistic and sociolinguistic resources, that ‘sedentary’ or ‘territorialized’ patterns of language use are complemented by ‘translocal’ or ‘deteritorialized’ forms of language use, and that the combination of both often accounts for unexpected sociolinguistic effects” (pp. 4–5). Blommaert (2010), therefore, advices to conceptualize language as “in motion” rather than as a fixed entity “in place,” which was mostly the trend in the yesteryears (cf. Kachru et al., 2009). Linguistic boundaries worldwide have already started to shrink, and almost disappear because of the rise of globalization, advancement in technology and boom in social networking sites. In such de-territorialized space (in the sense Blommaert used), the linguistic behavior of the global netizens resembles organic fluidity about which Khubchandani (1997) mentioned with reference to India. The earlier differences between different kinds of bilinguals become more blurred. It seems almost impossible to come up with a new kind of definition of bilingual or monolingual in the changing scenario.

In the light of such new direction toward defining and conceptualizing language, mostly as something being more fluid, hybrid and dynamic, our understanding of bilingualism, the notions of translation, the issue of mother tongue etc. owe a revisit. The more recent definition of language challenges the existing theories and language teaching frameworks, an important issue I wish to address in detail toward the latter part of the paper.

**Role of translation in teaching methods and approaches, bilingual models of education, and their limitations**

Mother tongue (MT) or L1 along with target language (TL) or L2 has been used in different language teaching methods to varying degrees. The following table sumps up the case briefly.

| Own language / Translation | Target Language / L2                          | Rare reference to OL at higher levels |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| West’s New Method 1937     | GTM                                           | Multiple Intelligences               |
| Reform Movement            | Dodson’s bilingual method 1967               |                                      |
| Direct Method              | Suggestopedia                                | Neurolinguistic Programming          |
Table 1: Classification of Language Teaching Methods based on use of OL/Translation (Adapted from Kabir, 2015, p. 128, and modified here)

| Method/Approach                                                                 | Competency Based Language Teaching |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Community Language Learning                                                    |                                    |
| The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching (SLT)                      |                                    |
| Whole Language                                                                 | Cooperative Language Learning      |
| Audio-Lingual Method                                                           |                                    |
| Task-Based Language Teaching                                                   | Silent Way                         |
| Total Physical Response                                                        |                                    |
| The Lexical Approach                                                           |                                    |
| The Natural Approach                                                           |                                    |
| Content-Based Instruction                                                      |                                    |
| Communicative Language Teaching                                                |                                    |
| Task-Based Language Teaching                                                   |                                    |

| Model                          | Goal                  | Target population | Languages of instruction |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Dual language                  | Bilingualism          | Majority          | L1 and L2                |
| Canadian immersion             | Bilingualism          | International majority | L2 then L1 added       |
|                                | Language revival      | Minority           | L2 heritage) and L1 (societal) |
|                                | Trilingualism         | Majority           | L3, and L2, L1          |
| Two-way bilingual              | Bilingualism          | Majority and minority | L1 and L2              |
| Maintenance bilingual          | Bilingualism          | Minority           | L1 and L2               |
| Bilingual programs for the deaf| Bilingualism          | Deaf and hard-of-hearing students minority | Sign language and L2 |

The notion toward L1 and L2 in these teaching methods and approaches seems to be based on ‘either-or’ principle, not ‘both-and’ principle. A dichotomous and replacive positioning between L1 and L2 is attributed. This, as a result, hampers the naturally happening ‘organic phenomenon’ of language(s), as mentioned by Khubchandani (1997).

Translation plays a crucial role in different bilingual models of education. The following tables illustrate its importance at a glance.
Table 2: Bilingual models and languages of instruction (Adapted from Brisk, 2006, pp. 33-34)

Table 2 considers L1 and L2 as fixed systems as well. Based on such ideas, Baker (2001) talks about two forms of bilingualism and their implications in bilingual education. L1 seems to play a significant role there as well.

| Type of Program                                      | Typical Type of Child | Language of the Classroom | Societal and Educational Aim | Aim in Language Outcome |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Transitional bilingual                               | ELD                   | Minority                  | L1 and L2                    |                          |
| Pull-out TBE                                         | ELD                   | Minority                  | L2 with some L1 support      | L1 for sometime and L2   |
| Integrated TBE                                       | ELD                   | Minority with majority    |                              |                          |
| Bilingual structured immersion                       | ELD                   | Minority                  | L2 with limited L1 support   |                          |

**English-only models**

| ESL                                                  | ELD                   | Minority                  | L2                          |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Structured immersion (sheltered English)             | ELD                   | Minority                  | L2 (some clarification in L1)|

**ELD= English language development**

Table 3: Weak forms of education for Bilingualism (Adapted from Baker, 2001, p. 194)
Table 4: Strong forms of education for Bilingualism (Adapted from Baker, 2001, p.194)

| Type of Program                  | Typical Type of Child | Language of the Classroom          | Societal and Educational Aim          | Aim in Language Outcome                        |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| IMMERSION                        | Language Majority     | Bilingual with Initial Emphasis on L2 | Pluralism and Enrichment              | Bilingualism & Biliteracy                      |
| MAINTENANCE/HERITAGE LANGUAGE    | Language Minority     | Bilingual with Emphasis on L1       | Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment  | Bilingualism & Biliteracy                      |
| TWO-WAY/DUAL LANGUAGE            | Mixed Language Minority & Majority | Minority and Majority              | Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment  | Bilingualism & Biliteracy                      |
| MAINSTREAM BILINGUAL             | Language Majority     | Two Majority Languages              | Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment  | Bilingualism & Biliteracy                      |

Notes: (1) L2 = Second Language; L1 = First Language; FL = Foreign Language.

It can be surmised from the above tables that all those teaching approaches and methods, and bilingual models of education are developed based on the fixed notions of language. They become vulnerable when they are approached from ‘fluidity’ notions of language, as discussed in the section titled ‘Notion towards translation . . .’, and to be further discussed in the upcoming section titled ‘Translation, translanguaging practices . . .’.

Practices in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced in 1995 (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012) and subsequently implemented from class VI (standard VI, first class of secondary level) to class XII (standard XII, last class of higher secondary level). It is known to us that L1 was not allowed in the earlier versions of CLT at all; however, later L1 was allowed in Task Based Language Teaching (Hung, 2012), a form of CLT. When CLT was introduced in Bangladesh, several researches reported the use of and positive attitude towards L1 i.e., Bangla by teachers and learners in pedagogical activities in classrooms. A baseline study (EIA, 2009) carried
out by English in Action project in 2008-9 on the spoken English competence of the learners and teachers found that most Bangladeshi learners and teachers possess basic level of spoken English competency in English. It also brought to light that the teachers were incapable of teaching according to the communicative English curriculum effectively due to their insufficient competence in English.

In a research work conducted at the secondary level, Islam and Ahsan (2011)) found that no students reported any English teacher who did not use Bangla in the English classroom (p. 206). They further found that majority of students prefer the use of Bangla in different stages of the English class. Kirkwood and Rae (2011) also found that students cannot communicate efficiently in English although the communicative approach aims at building up students’ communicative competence. Haider and Chowdhury (2012) found that only two teachers out of 16 teachers used English throughout the class; others used a mixture of Bangla and English. They use Bangla translation after reading the English text aloud to the students (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012, p. 17). Most of the teachers were found to teach vocabulary using Bangla. They showed their preference for Bangla because of their poor level of proficiency in English (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012). The poor level of proficiency of teachers has been stated in studies done by Ahmed (2014) and Haque (2014) as well.

Farooqui (2014) discovered almost all teachers outside urban areas used Bangla whereas most of the teachers in the urban areas used a mixture of Bangla and English. Whenever the teachers asked questions in English, students translated the texts into Bangla. English worked as an impediment to understanding. She (2014) found two reasons for using Bangla in the classroom: “the language proficiency of the students and the language proficiency of the teachers themselves” (p. 447). Salim (2014) mentioned more that around 90% teachers and students appreciate the facilitating role that Bangla plays in English classes.

Shrestha (2013) revealed, despite receiving training to take class in English, students reported that some teachers continued taking English class in Bangla and Bangla did not have any negative impact on the lesson. While they were interviewing the primary and secondary teachers and students after their training by English in Action Project, Perez-Gore et al. (2014) found that they had mixed opinions about the use of Bangla in the classroom. Training could not wean them off their tendency to use L1 or Bangla. Rahman et al. (2018)) point out 3 kinds of purposes of using mother tongue in English classes: for giving instruction in the classroom, for explaining to
the learners, and for translating the meaning (p. 301). They also found that teachers mentioned the pressure from the students for using Bangla, and used Bangla for giving even basic instructions (Rahman et al, 2018, p. 305).

The above discussion makes it evident that practices pertaining to the use of Bangla and translation are inevitable in English language classrooms of Bangladesh. Such practices are nurtured and implemented by both the teachers and the learners without any sense of negative feeling, rather with much appreciation from both the parties. Such practices seem natural and instinctive, and training fails to stop them to varying extent. The discussion of the above studies indicates that the reasons for using Bangla are both the deficiency of the teachers and the students to use and understand English, and their positive notion toward the facilitating role of Bangla in teaching English. Under such circumstances, the CLT based prescriptions of teaching English monolingually i.e. using English only becomes counterproductive to the practices and realities of the context of operation.

Translation, translanguaging practices, and translingual pedagogy

Garcia and Li (2014) cite Bakhtin claiming that, “language is inextricably bound to the context in which it exists and is incapable of neutrality because it emerges from the actions of speakers with certain perspective and ideological position” (p. 7). They tend to focus of the context of language users and their context rather than the language. They move from traditional understandings of language(s) as discrete system(s) to ‘languaging’ as a socially situated action, challenging the existing definitions and concepts, mostly flaunted from a monolingual approach.

Differentiating translanguaging from code-switching which indicates mixing or switching of two different static language codes, Garcia and Leiva (2014) present the definition of translanguaging in an elaborate manner:

Translanguaging, resting on the concept of transculturation, is about a new languaging reality, original and independent from any of the “parents” or codes, a new way of being, acting, and languaging in a different social, cultural, and political context. Translanguaging brings into the open discursive exchanges among people in ways that recognize their values of languaging. In allowing fluid discourses to flow, translanguaging has the potential to give voice to new social realities (p. 204).

According to Canagarajah (2011), translanguaging is “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse
languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (p. 401). He, rather blatantly, highlights both the means and the ends of translanguaging. García’s definition highlights the purpose of this linguistic practice when she (2009) defines translanguaging as “the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” (p. 140). Baker’s definition echoes García’s when he (2001) sees translanguaging as “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (p. 288). García and Lin (2016) talk about “strong” and “weak” versions of translanguaging (p. 124). The earlier one does not believe in differences between languages, but firmly talks about a single language system and a grammar from which language users opt for the features required in their interactions whereas the latter one abides by the traditional boundaries of language but pleads for the unstiffening the boundary marks, prioritizing the fluid and overlapping nature of between different language systems.

Translanguaging believes in one language system, different linguistic features, users’ access to them and ability to use from their rich linguistic repertoire to make meaning, or to communicate. Translation, on the hand, is the process of conversion of meaning-making process from one language to another where the basic belief is that each of the languages is different with their different systems. Hence, the meaning of translation from the translanguaging lens differs from the traditional understanding of translation; translation in translanguaging, adheres more to the requirements of the language users than to those of language.

Translingual pedagogy takes place in educational settings like classrooms which share many of the tenets of a ‘translingual space’, which, according to Li (2011), “is a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging” (p.1222). He further adds:

The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience. I call this space “translanguaging space”, a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging.

(Li, 2011:1223)

In a translanguaging space like L2 or FL classroom, teachers and learners translanguage indulging in discursive practice utilizing their diverse and rich
linguistic repertoire and composite linguistic resources for effective communication. It needs to be done so that new language practices are developed and old ones are sustained (Vallejo, 2018, p. 91). Discursive functions of translanguaging for the students include participation, elaboration of ideas and the raising of questions whereas those of the teachers include involving and giving voice, clarifying, reinforcing, managing the classroom, and extending and asking questions using translanguaging practices (Garcia & Leiva, 2014, p. 210). Translingual pedagogy, like translanguaging, includes the notions of codeswitching and translation but goes beyond their simplistic understanding and –

[. . . ] refers to the process in which bilingual students make sense and perform bilingually in the myriad ways of classrooms—reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, signing, and so on. However, translanguaging is not only a way to scaffold instruction and to make sense of learning and language; it is part of the discursive regimes that students in the 21st century must perform, part of a broad linguistic repertoire that includes, at times, the ability to function in the standardized academic languages required in schools. It is thus important to view translanguaging as complex discursive practices that enable bilingual students to also develop and enact standard academic ways of languaging. (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 389)

Translanguaging practices and translingual pedagogy seem to be more learner centered than language centered, more suitable to cope with the needs of the people and the pupils of the globalized world where a new meaning of translation emerges. In this new meaning, translation does not mean conversion or transfer of meaning from one language to another, but from the language users’ existing dynamic linguistic repertoire consisting of different linguistic features, to the targeted set(s) of linguistic feature(s), required by other users e.g., academia, corporate, community etc. The emergence of new meaning of translation, approached from translanguaging practices and translingual pedagogy calls for revisiting the existing practices of both translation and language pedagogy.

Conclusion

Recent definitions and perceptions of language have undergone a major shift from considering language as a fixed system to treating it as a more flexible and fluid one. The earlier definitions of bilingualism (see the section titled ‘Notion towards translation . . . ’), based on the fixed notion of language, suggested how teaching of L2 or FL using translation in/advertently is able to produce subordinate bilingual in foreign language settings like Bangladesh.
Translation in language teaching has also been theoretically understood, realized and used based on the fixed notion of language. However, the existing practices in Bangladesh demonstrate deviations from theoretical assumptions adopted in certain language teaching approaches like CLT where such assumptions are exclusively grounded on the sole use of L2 in pedagogical practices. Such deviations are termed to be compromised and often labelled as being stigmatized in teaching approaches built upon the fixed notions of language whereas, the stakeholders of education i.e., teachers and learners are mostly found to be appreciating them (see the section titled ‘Practices in Bangladesh’). Many of the reasons for using mother tongue in Bangladeshi classrooms, as mentioned in that section (Rahman et al., 2018:301), can be linked to be the determining factors behind the tasks and activities followed in translanguaging activities e.g., in one such functional reading-based activity used in a Hungarian classroom of first year pre-intermediate school students (Pacheco, 2016, p. 79 cited in Nagy, 2018, pp. 47) where learners use a hybridized version of mother tongue, Hungarian and the target language, English during task accomplishment. The teacher does not direct the students strictly about which language to use but she or he does not stop their linguistic behavior as well. The task is completed successfully.

Translanguaging practices and pedagogy hold prospect to a greater extent by acknowledging the agency that learners bring to the classroom. David et al. (2019) suggest that teachers, and researchers should focus explicitly on “students’ reflexive understandings about their own translanguaging practices” and institutions should incorporate learner experience with translanguaging practices into ‘instructional approaches’ and ‘pedagogical practices’ for ensuring ‘productive dialog’ (David et al., 2019, p. 272). Curriculum innovation, materials production, and teaching and learning traditions in Bangladesh, that are mostly based on the fixed notions of language need to be revisited from translanguaging theories and practices with a view to acknowledging and ensuring learner agency, promoting inclusiveness, and considering and utilizing their linguistic repertoire to the utmost level so that the scope of successful and effective language education can be maximized.

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1 This table has been made based on primarily the books by Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (2000).