

The Use of Parallel Text in Learning and Comprehension of L-2

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ABSTRACT

Any learning in a second language depends on the extent of its comprehension. The use of parallel text makes understanding the text more concrete. This paper is the report of an experiment that examines the use of parallel text in teaching the English language to non-native speakers. In the academic year 2020-2021, two sections of undergraduate students in their 2nd year were taken for experimentation. Due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the course was delivered in an online format. At first, in the experiment section, specially prepared parallel (in Hindi and English languages) was shared and the control section was provided with the same content without the aid of parallel text. All the materials to the students were shared through Google classroom and some tests were also prepared and administered through Google forms. Analyzing the responses from both sections, it is evident that students from the section studied with the aid of parallel text performed better in some areas.

Keywords: Parallel Texts, monolingual teaching, L2, Idgaah, Leo Tolstoy

Introduction:

The Foundation Course is mandatory for all the undergraduate degree programs as per MP Higher Education. It comprises Hindi and English for all three years of graduation across all streams. In addition to this, students need to study the basics of Entrepreneurship, Environment and Computers, in the first, second and third years respectively as the third constituent of the Foundation Course. The knowledge of the fundamentals of these subjects is essential for the professional development of the students. The objective of the Foundation Course is to provide a sound and levelled base to all the students in these subjects. Madhya Pradesh is primarily a Hindi-speaking state; the majority of students do not even have basic proficiency in English. It is evident that English in the present time has evolved into a 'language of

opportunity. Students eyeing reasonably good career opportunities are expected to have competence in English communication. Consequently, at different academic levels, several efforts continue to be made, to improve this skill among students.

Various approaches and methods are used to teach English to the students. Realizing the importance of English for the students, faculty members from the Department of English, use many ways to improve students' comprehension and learning of this language. The faculty members practice the Grammar-Translation method in teaching English text; where the meaning of the complete text is explained to the students in Hindi. Students are made to write word meanings. This method undoubtedly helps in understanding the text but this method does not help in developing

communication and fluency in L2 as students think in Hindi and then translate. So in this pursuit, most of the time, students are not able to speak fluently with confidence. Another approach practised is the direct method of English learning; in which English is being taught without any influence of mother tongue. But that approach is equally not acceptable, taking the skill level of these undergraduate students into account. Then there is the communicative approach of teaching English; where students are motivated to listen & read and then speak & write accordingly. But that approach also proves lop-sided as students hesitate and feel shy in speaking and presenting their views.

There are advocates of monolingual teaching policies who perceive L1 in the second language learning classroom as an impediment and counterproductive to language learning. On the other hand, there are many linguists, theorists, and researchers who regard L1 as an effective medium to enhance L2 learning (Cummins, 2005, 2007; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Turnbull & Daily-O Cain, 2009). Thus this experiment was designed to examine the use of Parallel Text in the teaching of English and its effects on learning and comprehension. This method incorporates elements from all the above-mentioned practices of Second language learning. In this approach text from both L1 and L2 are placed side by side but the L1 text is used not as the primary material but is referred to occasionally for comprehension of certain difficult concepts thus Grammar Translation methods are used, but only to an extent. In the same manner, a direct approach is followed but not purely, at various points scaffolding from L1 is taken in the understanding of L2.

Parallel text is one of two or more versions

of a literary work, etc, printed in a format that allows direct textual comparison, often on facing or consecutive pages of the same volume; a text containing different versions of the same work (e.g. In its original language and translation) set out in such a way. The term originated in the late 19 century, earliest use found in Frederick Furnivall (1825-1910), a textual scholar and editor. (Wikipedia)

A parallel text is a text placed alongside its translation or translations. Parallel text alignment is the identification of the corresponding sentences in both halves of the parallel text. The Loeb Classical Library and the Clay Sanskrit Library are two examples of dual-language series of texts. (Wikipedia) The Parallel text is quite a different type of text, as the name suggests, parallelism is introduced in this text through various means. It is a lot more than just an abridged or translated version of the original text. Rather, it contains two versions of the original work, one with the unabridged, original version on the one side of each two-page spread, and the modern translation with proper alignment on the other side of the page. Both versions are laid out in an identical format, so one need not turn the page to keep up with the L1 (translated) text. For better comprehension, students will read the original form in L2, and then read the modernized translation and again can go back to the original for comprehension and learning. The arrangement can be a sentence from the original text followed by an abridged version in L1 or it can be L1 text on one side and L2 on another. In the 'interlinear form,' the translated line is placed directly underneath the original text. Interlinear arrangement undoubtedly helps in the comprehension of text but it hampers the tendency to read the text in L2

and refer to L1 occasionally.

Parallel Text is in a way translated version of original work but it is different from the translation; as alignment of both the text, in one or more than one way, is a prerequisite for this. During translation, sentences can be split, merged, deleted, inserted or reordered by the translator. But making a text parallel, translators do not enjoy so much freedom as they have to align the text and this alignment of the text is a non-trivial task. (Wikipedia)

Prof Anand Mahanand has categorized parallel text into 'four main types. They are,

“a. Source and Translated Texts: Examples of these are Tagore’s Gitanjali in Bengali and English.

b. Theme-based Parallel texts: Two texts on identical themes. Examples of this are ‘The Coral Island’ and ‘Treasure Island.’

c. Trans-Generic Texts: When a novel is transformed from its original genre and made into a film. e.g. The Huckleberry Finn, The Scarlet Letter.

d. Created Parallel Texts: When a text is abridged, simplified or re-written in another form. For instance, a teacher dramatizes an essay to teach it to the students as the essay is linguistically complex.”

For this experiment, the purest type of parallel text i.e. Source and Translated Text; in which the content was arranged from L1 on one page and L2 on the other side of it. As the Parallel text was prepared on Google Docs, the content was arranged in such a way that when students read in full screen reading alignment, they had English content (L2) on the right-hand side and

on the left, its Hindi parallel. Though both the arrangements; Interlinear and text on facing or consecutive pages, are equally helpful in comprehension, the latter one is better for developing fluency in the non-native speakers of the language. Thus the text was presented in an arrangement where both the contents were kept, from L1 and L2 on the facing pages for better concentration and more attention of the students.

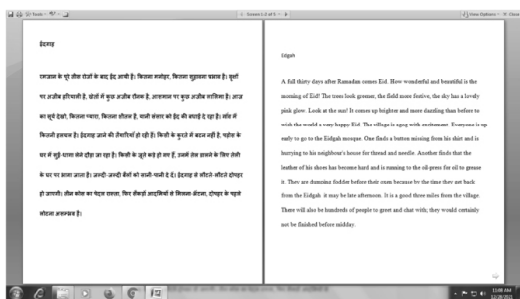
Prior to allotting the text to the experimental section, few guidelines related to the reading from the Parallel Text had been shared with the students. The prime purpose of this activity was to enhance the overall competency in L2. The first instruction given to the students was not to read from both languages all the time. Use L1 as an aid for understanding the L2. If they refer to both texts throughout, it will promote translation. The use of translation does not allow learners to acquire language naturally.

Secondly, the students were asked to read the L2 text two or more times till they were able to comprehend it without the scaffolding of the L1 text. The more they read, the better they would become in speaking, reading and writing of L2. It also makes them comfortable in a new language and helps them begin to think in that language when they’re using it.

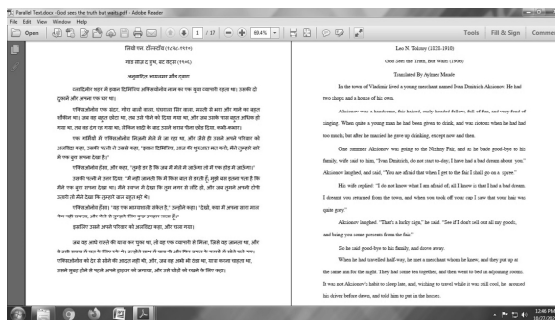
Lastly, the students were instructed to read out the content loudly whenever possible. It is imperative for every non-native speaker of the language, to read out loud when they are reading in a foreign language as it solidifies the information and grammar and helps them with things like pronunciation, rhythm, tone, etc. It is especially helpful if they combine this activity with Listening to the native speakers reading the

same content as it would support correct pronunciation.

With all the above guidelines in place, the text of the story Edgah by Premchand was shared with the students. This story was selected as the original Hindi version of the story was already available. The prescribed text was the translated version of the story by Kushwant Singh. As the story has been written in an Indian setting, it was quite relatable for students.



The students were also provided with Leo Tolstoy's 'God sees the Truth but waits'. The prescribed text was translated from the Russian language. For this study, the text was translated into Hindi with the help of Google Translator and prepared the document as per the design, specially chosen for this experiment; on the left Hindi version of the text and English text on the right-hand side.



During these two sessions, the researcher acted as the moderator and left the whole learning and understanding on the students. The complete procedure on how to read with or without parallel text was explained to the students. After each session, a specially prepared test was given to the students to test their comprehension of the text and grammatical accuracy and acquisition of vocabulary. Analyzing the responses collected through Google form, the performances of both the sections are appended below:

Performance of both the sections: (in %)

[Batch size of section-A was 60; the number of students attempted the test-42]

[Batch size of Section-B was 60; the number of students attempted the test-33]

	Section studied through Parallel Text [A]	Section studied through Text [B]
Comprehension of the text	93%	89%
Vocabulary development	97%	81%
Grammatically correct sentence constructions	76%	69%
Presenting innovatively	91%	73%
Overall learning	89.25%	78%

It must be noted that since this method of teaching was new to them, some students weren't very receptive at first.

The tests were conducted to check the competence of students in all the above-mentioned four areas. All the tests were specifically based on these two stories; 'Idgah By Premchand(Translated by Kushwant Singh) and 'God sees the truth but waits' by Leo Tolstoy (Prescribed English Translation by Aylmer Maude and Hindi translation done by the researcher)

As far as comprehension of the text was concerned, both the sections showed appreciable competency, though section [A] presented slightly better performance, whereas in the vocabulary test, section [A] showed remarkably better performance. The results for grammatical usage were slightly underwhelming from both the sections but section [A] had an edge as they presented the story very innovatively. As this method had created interest among the students of section [A], when asked to present any other appropriate title or any different ending for the story, they came up with quite interesting versions of these stories.

What was worth noticing was the participation of approximately 70% of the students from section [A]; though a reasonably good response from section [B] was received as well but it was comparatively low, merely 55%.The major advantage of using Parallel text in learning L2 was that it developed interest and involvement of the students in the whole learning process. Students not only read the stories with proper understanding but they grabbed the vocabulary and tried to use that vocabulary in their expression and presentation. It was evident when they were asked to express their views on the title and end of the stories, they were able to use acquired

vocabulary and some grammatical structures as well.

Another advantage of the use of parallel text in teaching English could be found in tackling various issues related to mixed learning ability classes. Since this approach promotes self-paced learning, and the teacher needs to play the role of moderator, it's comparatively convenient for the teacher to address the specific level of different students. In one of the earlier papers on "Ways to overcome the Barrier of Heterogeneity in English language Classroom", the researcher observed that:

.....mixed learning ability classes of English Language.....always present challenging situations for the instructors; to set the level of his/her lecture or content; to deliver at a level that arouses interest and present learning opportunities for every student in the class. If the lecture is delivered keeping students with a lower level of comprehension in English; the students having reasonably good command will not find the class engaging and similarly if the lecture is delivered to match the level of another set of students than probably students having little orientation in the English language will find the class beyond their comprehensible limits.**Conclusion:** This whole study was done as a part of a preliminary experiment. The prime purpose behind this experiment was to create interest among students for learning English by studying and understanding the prescribed text in the Foundation Course. This method was well received by the majority of students. Earlier the prime motive and attitude regarding this subject were to clear examinations and secure minimum passing marks. This undoubtedly brought a

change in students' attitudes towards L2 learning.

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ELTAI READING CLUBS

ELTAI has launched Reading Clubs in educational institutions with the primary objective of creating a 'culture of reading' among school and college students. This initiative is based on a research-based framework that takes into account differences in age, gender, interests, and location.

Objectives of the Reading Club:

- To create a love for reading in students and enable them to become better, lifelong readers;
- To enable them to reflect on what they read in order to lead them to become effective writers and speakers;
- To familiarize them with different text types (genres) and enable them to engage in appropriate reading strategies; and
- To employ synchronous (both virtual and physical meetings) as well as asynchronous modes – Web tools, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Blogs, Reading Logs, MOOCs (audios, videos, quotes, blurbs, reviews, etc.) to sustain their interest.

ELTAI would like to have MoUs with institutions that are willing to implement this initiative and help to achieve these objectives collaboratively. Institutions interested in this project may please write, expressing their interest, to: indiaeltai@gmail.com with a copy (Cc) to Dr. Zuleiha Shakeel, the Coordinator of the project at: zoowasif@gmail.com.

For a brief description of this initiative, visit our website at: <http://eltai.in/reading-clubs/>. For an outline of the respective roles and responsibilities of the host institution and ELTAI, visit the website at: <http://eltai.in/roles-and-responsibilities-of-the-host-institution-and-eltai/>.