

Teaching Speaking skills and Culture through CLIL

Rosy Yumnam

Assistant Professor, Department of ELT, The English and Foreign Languages University, Shillong Campus, Meghalaya

Abstract: Language and culture are interdependent and their contributions to the teaching and learning of a second language are immense. Language is used as a means to communicate with others through sounds with well intended meanings to establish rules and maintain culture within a particular community. The study aims at exploring the purviews of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to teach speaking skills and culture using *Leithak Leikharon* which is an indigenous myth detailing the theory of creation of Manipur. The study was conducted with the students of one of the schools of Manipur. The study indicated that the CLIL approach using the indigenous material assisted in developing speaking skills as well as understanding culture.

Key words: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Culture, *Leithak Leikharon*, English Language Teaching

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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Learning the subject of the content by using the target language, i.e., English as a second language stimulates the learners with a feeling of satisfaction, contentment and fulfilment. It enhances the learner's understanding the subject as well as the target language. The term Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL) was coined by David Marsh (1994) and defined as the condition when a foreign language is used to teach parts of subjects or subjects with a dual aim, i.e., to concurrently learn the content as well as a foreign language (Marsh as qtd. in Ruiz, id 47991).

The classroom practices using CLIL approaches rely on the principles of the second language acquisition theory (Coyle, 2005 in Coyle, 2008 p. 98). CLIL is influenced by the learning theory which believes in the idea that social interaction plays a pivotal role in learning where in a given context, the knowledge to be acquired is practised in the learning process (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, p. 8). In social interaction theory, the learners are believed to acquire knowledge and skills through their communications in the community. Relatedly, Dalton-Puffer (2007) stresses on Vygotsky's socio-cognitive development theory which believes in the notion that cognition development in a learner takes place in a social interaction environment where the learner's interaction with her/ his social surroundings plays a key role in developing the learner's cognitive faculties (p. 8). In this context, Dalton-Puffer's (2007) quotes of Vygotsky can be explained as that the cultural development of a child takes place at two levels viz., the social level where the interaction is between people and the individual level where the interaction takes place within the child; this further assist in the development of the child's rationale memory, voluntary attention and construction of concepts which ultimately leads to the notion that all individuals function in actual relationships between each other (p. 9). This theory has found its application in 'the second language acquisition research community e.g. Hall and Verplaetse 2000' (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, p. 9).

From the above discussions, it is believed that CLIL is the upshot of the learning theory mentioned above. This learning theory describes the relationship of the learners with their environment. In CLIL approach, society and the environment play a vital role in the teaching and learning process. The learner first use language for social interaction and therefore the social environment is required for the cognitive learning of content and the language. In this sense, if the environment plays a pertinent role in the acquisition of a second language, it is believed that second language learning along the regional context can be highly effective.

Furthermore, language is learnt through language use and practice. For the acquisition of mother tongue, the sequence of learning is the L-S-R-W (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Listening and speaking are usually acquired at home and the surrounding environment. Reading and writing are generally learnt in schools. So, the learner gets ample scope of practising her/ his mother tongue at home, neighbourhood and school. The learners are highly motivated in learning the mother tongue as it is the only means to express their needs and desires. Conversely, in learning a second language like English, the language is learnt at school, in a formal classroom. In the absence of a natural learning environment, the formal classrooms have to be

equipped with a supportive linguistic environment. Therefore, it is conducive to provide ample opportunities and motivation in the classroom through well planned activities with values and culturally sensitive material which will cater to their natural learning. The teaching of speaking skills is an important aspect in language teaching. As the social environment plays an important role in developing the speaking skills of the learners, the CLIL approach emphasising on Vygotsky's socio-cognitive development theory can be conducive to teach speaking skills.

Relatedly, there have been various researches on the relations between language and culture in language teaching. Regarding the teaching of culture, Kramersch (1996) asserts that the word culture, "whether it is called (Fr.) *civilization*, (G.) *Landeskunde*, or (Eng.) *culture*" (p. 8) is generally considered as information or ideas communicated "by the language, not as a feature of language itself" (p. 8); therefore, the educational objective of cultural awareness becomes an important aspect which is different from the study of language (p. 8). She further adds that if one sees language as a means of social practice then culture is attributed as the fundamental aspect in language teaching (Kramersch, 1996, p. 8). Therefore, cultural awareness should be regarded as a means of facilitating language proficiency and also as means of achieving the result as propounded by the manifestation on language proficiency (Kramersch, 1996, p. 8). In the light of the above discussions, it can be observed that the use of the indigenous cultural material of Manipur, *Leithak Leikharon* may be explored to integrate the teaching of speaking skills and culture in the upper primary schools of Manipur. *Leithak Leikharon* describes the myth of the theory of creation of the Meiteis (i.e. one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the plains of Manipur).

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to teach speaking skills and culture through the CLIL approach using *Leithak Leikharon* in the upper primary schools of Manipur.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURE IN *LEITHAK LEIKHARON*

The story of the myth of creation is evident in every community in a society and it serves as an important factor to nurture the culture of a particular society. The historical reference to *Leithak Leikharon* is that it is believed to have been written during the reign of King Khagemba of Manipur (1526-1556 A.D.) (Singh, 2003, p. 82). It is anonymously written in *Meitei Mayek* script. Amongst the four human sub-periods of the origin of the Meitei history, the last period called Konna Chak is believed to be the time where *Leithak Leikharon* begins. The preceding period to Konna Chak called Langba Chak was believed to be destroyed completely by fire. This ravaging fire was the reason for the destruction of all Gods and creatures in the universe with the exception of the three Gods, viz., Taibangpanba Mapu, Atingkok and Amamba (Laisram, 2009, p. 69). The Almighty, Taibangpanba Mapu and his consort, Leimaren Sidabi had three sons viz., Atiya, Asheeba (Sanamahi) and Konjin Tuthokpa (Pakhangba). Taibangpanba Mapu is also believed to be manifested in Atingkok as air, Asheeba as water and Konjin Tuthokpa as fire. Atiya and Asheeba were entrusted with the responsibility of creation with the assistance of Atingkok. Atingkok opened his mouth and Atiya could visualise the entire living forms of the universe. With these came out the various life forms on the earth. Thus, the creation mythological narrative of the Meiteis is the main source of the story of *Leithak Leikharon*. With this creation myth at the background, the events, characters and settings of the story are structured.

The creation myths which every culture nurtures have played a vital role in internalising one's inner consciousness to define one's identity. As *Leithak Leikharon* attempts to chronicle the myth of the theory of creation of the Meiteis, the understanding of the text is conducive to understand the rich *Meitei* cultural traditions and the origin of the beginning of the universe. In the story, *Leithak Leikharon*, with the creation myth in the background, Atiya, the eldest son of the Almighty, Taibangpanba Mapu first created a tortoise and then sitting on the floating tortoise in the water, the earth was created. The earth was not able to survive and turned into a cloud. And then Atiya created an eel out of the broken pieces of the earth and another earth was created. This too was destroyed and turned into snow. Then, finally Atiya created a black beetle and with it the earth was also born. This mythical story of creation as depicted in *Leithak Leikharon* alludes to the performance of the ritual dance in the *Lai Haraoba* festival which is a religious and social festival of Manipur.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study uses CLIL approach where the learner becomes cognitively acquainted with the language and content. For the content, the extract of the English translation of *Leithak Leikharon* was taken up for the study. The study was conducted with the students of class VII from Catholic School, Imphal, Manipur. The number of students who participated in the study is 80. Pre-test and post-test method was used to test the speaking skills and the understanding of the content of the student participants. In the pre-test method, the conventional prose prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur was used.

In the post-test method, the extract of *Leithak Leikharon* adopting the CLIL approach was used. The assessment of the speaking skills was done based on the student participants' understanding the knowledge of content, learning and using basic vocabulary, speaking about the content in an organised structure and the application of the knowledge learnt. The tasks and activities are carried out in two parts based on the content. In the first part, the student participants are tested based on understanding the knowledge of the content. The second part tests the student participants' application of the knowledge learnt. The tasks and activities which are used in the post-test are:

1. group discussion based on the topic 'The culture of my community'
2. enacting a one-act play based on the story incorporating culture drawn from the extract
3. to speak on the topic 'Creation myth in *Leithak Leikharon*'
4. group activity: to find out and speak on the various forms of dances of the *Lai Haraoba* festival
5. to read the extract and ask them to discuss in the class
6. to read the extract and ask them to critically comment in the class.

V. FINDINGS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the pre-test and post-test indicated that there has been a slight rise in the development of the learning of speaking skills by the time the extract of *Leithak Leikharon* was used in the class. The first part when the student participants were tested in understanding the knowledge of the content, there has been an increase in the development of learning from 45% when the conventional prose was used to 54% when the extract of *Leithak Leikharon* was used. In the second part of the test, when the student participants were tested based on the application of the knowledge learnt, there has been an increase from 31% when the conventional prose was used to 52% when the extract of *Leithak Leikharon* was used. In both the cases, the reason in the increase of the development of the speaking skills might be because of the use of the cultural material which is familiar to the student participants. The extract of *Leithak Leikharon* used as content is in the background knowledge of most of the student participants and so it becomes easier to understand the knowledge of the content. Relatedly, the tasks and activities in the post-test enabled the student participants to exercise their cognitive skills and provide an environment of social interaction. Furthermore, the tasks and activities also helped the student participants to interact with the community by means of investigating the cultural traditions and rituals. The student participants were instructed to use English language in performing the tasks and activities. In the group discussion based on the topic 'The culture of my community', the student participants engaged in a form of dialogue with their community to discuss the various facets of their culture. In the group activity to find out and speak on the various forms of dances of the *Lai Haraoba* festival, the student participants interacted with people in the neighbourhood to delve into the diverse forms of dances of the *Lai Haraoba* festival and their religious, cultural and societal implications. The information they investigated were then discussed in the class. The above mentioned tasks and activities thus provide a platform for the student participants to provide a social environment conducive to inculcate speaking skills as has been emphasised by Vygotsky's socio-cognitive development theory which has been the basic principle of the CLIL approach. As society and the environment play a vital role in the teaching and learning process in the CLIL approach, the student participants are able to use language for social interaction. Moreover, culture represents the way people live through various beliefs, traditions and social practices, so the story of the myth of creation of *Leithak Leikharon* assisted the student participants to understand the various cultural implications discernible throughout the narration. With these observations, it can be inferred that the degree of learning of speaking skills based on application is more when using the extract of *Leithak Leikharon* than while using the conventional prose.

The findings of the study showed that there has been concurrent learning in both the cases when using the conventional prose and when using the extract of *Leithak Leikharon*. However, the level of learning of the speaking skills in terms of understanding the content as well as application of the knowledge learnt is found to be slightly higher when the extract of *Leithak Leikharon* was used.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study indicated that the use of *Leithak Leikharon* to teach speaking skills and to understand culture using the CLIL approach enabled the student participants to enhance the development of learning of the speaking skills at the same time preserving and promoting the indigenous culture. The origin of the beginning of the universe as explained in *Leithak Leikharon* assisted the student participants to understand the Meitei cultural traditions. The study showed that the competency level of the student participants' speaking skills have developed to a certain level by using the indigenous cultural material in a social environment. However, the development level of learning of the speaking skills and content in the pre-test and post-test is not as desired. As has been observed from the study, continuous exposure to the English language through the use of cultural material can be suggested to achieve an optimal level of the learning of the speaking skills of the student participants.

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