Looking through the teachers’ ‘other languages’ use/preferences: A study of the monolingual mindset in MLE classrooms in Andhra Pradesh, India

Multilingual education in India is essentially affirmation which is supported by Constitutional Articles and Statutes. However the implementation in the ‘best and appropriate’ method rests with the State (Andhra Pradesh) which adopts the ‘monolingual mindset’ to education where all discourses congregate around the acquisition, dissemination and planning of one language – English. The visible manifestation of the monolingual mindset in the MLE programmes for ‘tribal’ children is two-fold: 1) its use of metaphors of ‘transition’ to English medium instruction (EMI) and ‘bridging’ the knowledge and language requirements to be able to transit to EMI and 2) explicit discourses on the need for English as a sole medium for empowerment, access and development. Consecutively, the State of Andhra Pradesh, has committed to MLE only till class V. The State has, further, adopted two debilitating monolingual strategies: a) the conversion strategy where MTBE schools are converted into EMI and b) Parallel sections strategy where a parallel EMI sections are started. This implies that after class V the learner has to transit to the nearest mainstream school where the learner will encounter either EMI or Regional language as MTBE both of which are not the tribal learners’ strong languages and where they are likely to encounter both MLE and non-MLE teachers. In such contexts, a knowledge gap of how language and non-language teachers teaching in MLE areas view ‘other’ languages in the classroom space exists. This gap becomes pertinent in the MLE contexts since the trained teachers and untrained teachers with or without mainstream orientations teach tribal learners. This paper is a humble attempt to understand teacher implicit belief regarding their preference/use of ‘other’ language in the classroom.

Research interest: How do teachers perceive the presence of ‘other’ languages in the classroom in MLE space?

Teacher participants: Language and Content teachers in MLE schools and non-MLE teachers in MLE areas

Data Collection:

1. Phase 1: A survey questionnaire (276)
2. Phase 2: A Semi structured interview (40)

Findings:
RQ1. Do teachers use ‘other’ languages’ and do they allow learners ‘allow’ their learners use other languages in class?

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<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you use other languages in the classroom?</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ‘allow’ your learners to use other</td>
<td>(66%)</td>
<td>(34%)</td>
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<td>languages?</td>
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RQ 2. Why do teachers choose to use/not use other languages in class?
Two themes emerged:
1. Pedagogic justification: 26 teachers related their other language use to learner aspects and aspects pertaining to the difficulties language create for accessing knowledge.
2. Ideological justification: 14 teachers said that their reasons for using or not using other languages were reactions to official mandates on policy and practice.

RQ 3. Do teachers’ allow their learners use/not use ‘other’ languages in their classroom?

All 40 teachers said that their learners are free to use their own languages outside the classroom. For
example, one of the teachers said, ‘We do not mind their language in the playground.’ Another said, ‘They are free to use any language outside.’ However the same cannot be said of the classroom space. Three themes were noticed.

1. ‘Allowing’ learners’ use of other languages as a resource: Of the 40 interviewed respondents, 24 viewed learner languages as a resource for facilitating understanding and participation in classroom activity and that learners’ multilingual abilities play a positive role in problem solving especially in content subjects; as a tool to access knowledge and as the primary coder of experiences.

2. ‘Allowing’ learners’ use of other languages as a right: 3 teachers claimed that their learners had the constitutional right conferred by Article 30, to use any language in the classroom to engage in the lesson.

3. ‘Allowing’ learners’ use of other languages as an impediment: 13 teachers gave a variety of reasons to support their perception that ‘allowing’ learners’ use other languages was an impediment to their access to higher educational opportunities and to federal scholarships and affirmative action in reservations.

Discussion:

1. Teachers evidenced implicit idiosyncratic ‘policies’ ranging from complex and contrasting polarities.
   a. Situated hierarchies in languages are attached to access and gate-keeping process.
   b. Ideologies of ‘ourness’ and ‘otherness’ and our ‘ourness’
   c. Awareness of the efficacy of interdependency

2. Internal contradiction in languages as carriers of power, identity and surrender-value
   a. Differential value to MLE and issue of ‘access’
   b. Differential views on ‘other’ language efficacy
      i. Content teachers focus: access to knowledge and participation
      ii. Language Teacher goals:
         1. Parallel/dual monolingualism
         2. bi/plurilinguality in ‘ourness’

The findings are a sample of teacher implicit language policies in the classroom space and the way teachers operationalise the same point out the additive and the subtractive nature in the same space. Current pre-service teacher education pays minimal attention to teacher cognition and its impact on teaching-learning. The current 1 year course includes canonical packets pertaining to linguistics, psychology, administration, statistics, methods, testing and curriculum development. Despite being a multilingual nation a cursory mention of bilingual method without deeper discussions of bilingualism, the bilingual brain, the interdependence of languages and their relation to cognition is a reality of the programme. Neither is there a discussion of the MLE projects in India nor is there a component that explicates the human rights commitment to access and socio-economic developmental opportunity through education.