



REVIEW

Case Study: CUP between L1 and L2

Sihong Wang*

University of Southern California, California, 90007, U.S.

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ABSTRACT

This case study project explores the English language learning process of a student named Abby*(name changed for confidentiality), an adult beginning learner studied at Abram Friedman Occupational Center (AFOC).^[1] The paper focuses on analyzing under the theoretical concept of Common Underlying Proficiency model (CUP), especially the language transfer with the data collected from ten weeks of observation, interview with the case study student and her teacher, the chat with her classmates, and the samples of the student's work. Data is acquired from the community, school, and classroom, to include all related factor that may influence and reflect the relationship between the student's first language (L1) - Spanish and her second language (L2) - English. The paper intends to analyze the L1 of the case study student plays a positive role during the process of learning English via three sub-claims. Finally, the paper provides recommendations to support the student to use her L1 to promote English learning comprehensively and end with reflections on the case study process.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this case study is to focus on CUP (Common Underlying Proficiency model) development of an adult school Short Term English Learner (STEL) student, with respect to the relationship between L1 (Spanish) and L2 (English) of the student during the study in her current Beginning High A level class. Firstly, I will go over the community, school and classroom contexts of the case study, followed by an introduction of the case study student. Then I will explain the methodology used to collect data, the limitation of the study and the related theoretical concepts of this case study: CUP, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Following the literature review will be the analysis of my three sub-claims, leading up to the central claim that the L1 of the case study student can improve her L2 learning. Finally, the study will end with recommendations for further study to student and reflections on the case study process.

1.2 Context and Student

The case study site is an ESL Beg. High A Level class and students here are immigrant and STEL in that all of them will receive the promotional test to reclassify after four-month study. Ten out of 12 students are Hispanic, and another two students are Ethiopia. All the students are adults. Ten of them have jobs and two students are unemployed. One student is 18 years old, and the rest of them are older than 18. The Abram Friedman Occupational Center ranked the 1st in the adult education centers of a part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and 86.1% Hispanic or Latino, 8.73% African American, 2.43% White, 2.41% Asian, 0.14% Native American in this center. More than 8000 thousand students enroll per year, 20 career programs are provided, and seven-course levels of English (AFOC, 2018).^[1] The school sites at Downtown neighborhood in Central Los Angeles. The community consists of 36.7% Latino, 22.3% Black, 21.3% Asian, 16.2% white (Los Angeles Times, 2018).^[6] The average household income \$15,003 and there is a high percentage of residents over 25 years old with less than a high school diploma in this area.

The case study student, referred to as Abby, is an adult beginning learner. She doesn't have a job, so she has a large amount of free time. Therefore, she decided to improve her English ability and studied at the English as a Second Language program in the AFOC.

She has never received any Spanish test to evaluate the Spanish level, and she just passed the CASAS promotional test to evaluate the ability of reading and understanding simple texts on familiar topic (CASAS, 2009),^[3] comprehending high frequency words, phrases, and simple idioms in listening (CASAS, 2009),^[2] using simple words idioms drawn from functional life skill topics (CASAS, 2010)^[4] in March and moved to the Beg. High B level. She lives with her family members and speaks Spanish in daily life. The only time she uses English is communicating with the instructor and practicing in class. All the students in this class can speak Spanish fluently, and they use Spanish to communicate during the break and after classes. I selected this case study student under the guidance of her teacher, her high attendance. Meanwhile, she is willing to answer my questions when we communicated during the break. Although she always keeps quiet and rarely answers questions in front of students, she can consistently follow the teacher during the lesson.

2. Methods

2.1 Data Collection & Analysis

Most essential data collection for this case study was done through the daily observation and conversation, interviews. I chatted regularly with Abby during the break and took note about her performance in and out of the class, such as she marked on the textbook and handouts when the teacher introduces new English words, new definition, the practicing process, the interaction with the teacher, and the communication with her classmates.

Furthermore, I also interviewed the student and her teacher to get some information about her English ability and the usage of L1. For example, I designed some context to ask her to provide the answers. When it comes to the instructor interview, I will ask him about the utilize of Spanish during class time and its effect on Abby, and some situations he observes about the student. Finally, I asked for her permission to access and analyze a formative writing assessment.

2.2 Limitations of Study

I only met the student once or twice a week for two hours each. It is not enough for me to observe and collect a large amount of data to comprehensively analyze

her behavior as expected. What's more, the student only allowed me to access one of her assessments and cannot take pictures. As a result, the data comes from her work is limited. Besides, as she has never received the standard evaluation of Spanish, I evaluate her Spanish proficiency from the observation and interview. Somehow. It may cause the paper to become not objective enough. As a result, all of these restrict me from studying the influence of her L1 on her English learning.

3. Literature Review

The main theoretical concept in this case study is CUP. During the analyzing process, two related theories, BICS and CALP are also mentioned. According to Peregoy & Boyle (2013), BICS is the ability to use common words, simple sentences to talk about everyday topics and it can be achieved through the learning of one to two years.^[7] CALP is the usage of complex sentences and academic vocabulary words about academic issues, which needs three to nine years to reach. Through the observation, Abby talked with her classmates fluently in Spanish during the break and after the class. It is evident that she has a high BICS in Spanish. During the interview with her, she said she has lived in Nicaragua for more than 30 years and moved here because of her children. During the class, I found she always used some Spanish words to mark the reading passages and write the explanation. This can show she has a high CALP in Spanish as well.

The CUP is also called one balloon theory, and the primary assumption of it is that L1 and L2 can coexist in the same part of the brain, reinforce and mutually promote the development of each other (Cummins, 2005). It is necessary to mention the Iceberg Model when stating the BICS, CALP, and CUP.^[5] The Iceberg Model believes that although the first and second language seems different on the surface, two languages manage through one same system under the water (in the brain). In other words, the high proficiency level of L1 (reading, listening, speaking and writing) can benefit and improve the learning of L2. As Cummins (2005) mentioned, this process of promotion can be regarded as a kind of language transfer.^[5] Due to Abby's high BICS and CALP of Spanish, her behavior during the class time, such as used the Spanish words to mark the textbook, and the answers of the interview, her L1 helps the learning of English.

4. Analysis

In this analysis, I will discuss how Abby's L1 improve her L2 learning.

4.1 L1 CALP Benefits for English Writing

The first sub-claim of this case study aims to prove that the student's L1 benefits her learning of English writing. According to my conversations with Abby, every week's observation, and the writing assessment, I have concluded that Abby's L1 plays a positive role during the English writing learning process. One piece of evidence can be seen in the interview. In my interview with her, I ask her If you need to write a thank-you note (she has never learned this writing in English before) to the teacher, what components need to be included. She said it needs to include "the person I thank, the content, the best regards, and my name." Then I ask her how she knows the method to write it? She said: "I learn in Spanish." The reason why I consider her L1 can improve her English writing learning is also in association with every week's observation. During the class of introducing the simple past tense, the teacher asked them to write some sentences related to the birthday party in this tense. In Spanish, the verb always adds -ar, -ir when it comes to other pronouns or tenses. Therefore, when doing the writing exercise, she tries to add -ed after every verb. When the teacher introduced the third person, Abby also attached -es after each verb. Furthermore, the usage of Spanish also reflects in her writing assessment. Students are asked to write sentences about the items in a house with the sentence structure "there be" as the formative assessment. In Abby's assessment, she wrote: There are two sofás in this house. There is a televisión in the house.

Just as Cummins (2005) describes, high BICS and CALP of L1 can help students improve their L2 study. [5] Abby knows the writing method and components of thank-you note in Spanish and skilled masters the conjugation of Spanish vocabulary words. Both benefit her English writing. When considering the advantage of Spanish on writing, the claim aligns well with the Cummins's CUP.

4.2 L1 Benefits for English Reading

The second sub-claim is that the student's L1 promotes her learning of English reading. This can be proved through the interviews with the case study student and her teacher. Compared to her low English proficiency level, I chose a little difficult reading passage (See Appendix A) and asked her to tell the main idea of it. She answered: "father need to come to meet the teacher." I asked that the reason the father of students need to come to the school. She said: "low score." She successfully got the main idea of the material. Then I asked her the way

to figure out the idea. She pointed out the words: class, family, exam, score. She provided the explanation after I asked the reason: "some are same form in Spanish and I think they mean the same things." Besides, through the interview with the host teacher, I asked about some strategies that Abby used when doing the reading. The teacher said: "Abby could answer the questions followed by the passage with Spanish pronunciation. In other words, she finds these English words not only have the same form as the Spanish words but also the same meaning." This improvement from L1 can also be recognized through daily observation. During class time, Abby also uses Spanish words to mark the texts and handouts to help her study. For example, when the teacher explained the word "hang," she wrote the Spanish word "colgar" beside it.

Although Spanish and English belong to different language families, they still have some similarities with each other. According to Cummins (2005), the first language and the second language seems separate on the surface, but they twist with each other under the water. [5] Similar vocabulary words help Abby to comprehend the reading passage and answer the following questions. This proves that the Spanish improve her English reading, facilitating her L2 learning.

Appendix A

The teacher asked the whole class to do an exam last week. Today, she distributes the exam paper to each student. Then she decides to talk with some students individually. She is furious about their score, and she cannot believe that the students in her class can get that kind of grade. She will inform the family members of the students to communicate with the teacher about the performance of the student at home.

4.3 L1 Benefits for Acquiring New Knowledge

The teacher related L1 background knowledge with the new content. This claim can be proved through observation during class time. When the teacher introduced the new material, he was accustomed to explaining the keywords and the main content in Spanish to help students understand.

For instance, when present the new content, he always said: "How to say it in Spanish?". One the one hand, it helps students to comprehend the knowledge more clearly. On the other hand, the teacher can also check whether they concentrate on the class and understand the new content. What's more, he allowed and recommended the classmates to explain for Abby in Spanish. This can be regarded as a kind of scaffold to help students learn and acquire the knowledge (Walqui, 2006). [8] In each class, Abby always kept quiet in the class, and the teacher liked to ask whether she understands. Sometimes, she

expressed her difficulties about the content, however, due to the limited Spanish words of the teacher and Abby's low English level, the teacher cannot explain the concept clearly for her. Therefore, he always asked students to use Spanish to explain and teach her. The sub-claim can also be recognized from the interview with the student. I asked her if you need to do a listening test, but you don't know all the words in the material. How will you try to understand the material and answer the questions below? Abby responded: "people, time, thing, happy or angry, sound." I asked her what the meaning of "sound". She said the pronunciation of the words. It can help her answer the questions that it is to assist her to find similar English words.

As Perego & Boyle (2013) state, it needs approximately three to nine years to cultivate the CALP.^[7] As the first language, Abby has learned for many years and she always used the Spanish as a scaffold. As a result, she can understand the explanation of Spanish from teacher and classmates easily, and this assists her to know about English further. When considering these assistances as a kind of L1 background knowledge, this claim well supports the CUP theory.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, my main claim is that Abby's L1(Spanish) drives progress on her L2(English) learning. Because Spanish is her first language, it is natural for her to use the Spanish during the process of English learning. Based on daily observation and the interview, she has high BICS and CALP of Spanish, and she is willing to use in the learning process. To be objective, the L1 will promote her L2 learning from different aspects (reading, writing, etc.).

In order to create an environment better suitable for Abby to apply L1 to help the L2 learning, I have three recommendations: maintain the bilingual teaching method, encourage the student to continue L1 development, and find the similarities between Spanish and English further. As Abby's teacher said, students in this class are at the beginning level. They have problems with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc. English-only program doesn't suit adult beginning learners. They even cannot completely understand what I talk about in the class. Using the Spanish to introduce the new content and allow them to explain with each other can help them understand and promote their learning.

Encouraging students to continue L1 development is essential because a strong foundation (BICS & CALP) of L1 can assist the learning of English. This central idea of this paper is that the L1 and L2 can reinforce and mu-

tually improve each other due to the origination of two languages (Cummins, 2005).^[5] If students can enlarge their vocabulary and enhance grammar, it is easier for them to acquire the idea of new knowledge. They can also know more writing by learning some writing forms.

Last but not least, finding and summarizing the similarities between Spanish and English can further help students improve. All the students in this class speak Spanish as their first language and their knowledge about English is limited. Therefore, it is difficult for them to find similarities and use them. If the teacher can conclude the similarities between Spanish and English, it will enhance the efficiency of student's learning.

6. Personal Reflection on Case Study Experience

The experience is amazing. Throughout this case study, my biggest takeaway is that student-centered instruction is crucial. It is necessary for the teacher to observe each student, know about their background knowledge, and have talks with them. For the teacher, this is helpful to change the way of instruction to align well with the students. Through the observation, the interview and the analysis of the assessment of my case study student, I deeply know about her and find some approaches to improve her English. This takeaway not only suits my case study but also other types of classes. For this reason, I raise the importance of the recommendations section, as it is to analyze results of the case study and reflects the student-centered instruction which is the predominant teaching method of the current time.

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