

Challenges and Solutions in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language in India: Exploring the Role of Mother Tongue

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Abstract

Teaching Spanish in India presents unique challenges. Due to its diverse geography, various teaching setups exist, catering to students' different needs who come from diverse regions. Some have access to classrooms, while others simply cannot afford them. Many of them rely on outdated methods like grammar-translation due to a lack of awareness of modern approaches. It is also to be noted that English proficiency is limited in rural and semi-urban areas. Teaching Spanish is challenging in this context. One solution in this case might be using the mother tongue, such as Hindi, to enhance understanding and to facilitate learning. This paper explores how Spanish can be better learned through Hindi, advocating for bilingualism. The research methodology in this case is qualitative, focusing on understanding student motivation and beliefs while considering the broader implications of using mother tongue to teach a foreign language.

Keywords: didactics, mother tongue, comparative phraseology, contrastive analysis, Hindi, Spanish.

Introduction

The process of imparting foreign language education in India is a multifaceted endeavour, shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic factors. In this diverse and culturally rich nation, considerations beyond traditional pedagogical norms become

imperative when we need to think about imparting foreign language learning skills.

There is not a unique singular factor that affects the teaching of any foreign language. Rather there are many contributors who claim stake in this process, be it different linguistic background or an unequal access to conventional classrooms. Teaching Spanish through Hindi presents its own set of advantages, particularly owing to areas where these two languages align grammatically. There are various linguistic categories where similarities between Spanish and Hindi occur, such as the pronunciation of certain letters, which may lack English equivalents but find correspondence in Hindi.

India's linguistic diversity poses challenges for foreign language learning, as many students come from places with multiple languages or dialects. While interest in learning foreign languages has grown due to economic development, access remains limited, particularly in remote states. Besides, none of the major universities focus on developing or using teaching material in Hindi (mother tongue of the majority of the students in these universities). Not being able to maximize the benefits of using mother tongue for foreign language learning is one of the drawbacks in this case.

Beginners struggle to understand their teachers in Spanish classes. Some students prefer not to abandon traditional learning methods that have yielded results for them. Teaching Spanish in India demands effort from students as well as teachers, but not referring to the mother tongue without considering students' learning preferences can be problematic.

Comparative phraseology and the role of mother tongue

To understand the use of mother tongue in foreign language learning, we have to understand the monolingual and bilingual

approaches first. The ones that vouch for the former one, emphasize upon target language being the centre of learning [Tzagari, Georgiou 2016]. Owing to that approach, there has been negligible use of mother tongue in the classrooms. Tzagari and Georgiou [2016] have also referred to many curriculum and policy changes in several Asian and European countries owing to a monolingual approach [McMillan, Rivers 2011; Brown 2007; Nunan 2003; Littlewood, Yu 2011]. While there are also supporters of the bilingual approach who advocate for mother tongue and its usefulness while developing the cognitive and communicative skills in a language that the students are learning.

Using mother tongue while teaching a foreign language has immense possibilities as it is very common to witness code switching in classrooms, especially when the students and the teachers speak the same language. In that scenario, the role of a psychologically enabling environment cannot be denied [Tzagari, Georgiou 2016; Cook 2001].

While teaching Spanish to Indian students, using Hindi in classrooms may prove to be a shot in the arm [Kumar 2016, 2018]. The contrastive phraseological analysis between Spanish and Hindi reveals that they have similarities and differences in terms of metaphorical thinking, syntax and proverbs. It is also noted that both languages use these tools to articulate abstract ideas, although the nature of these expressions may vary from language to language. Despite these differences, contrastive phraseological analysis can be a valuable tool to improve the understanding and use of these expressions in both languages. Certainly, the analysis of contrastive phraseology helps us to better appreciate and understand the complexities and richness of these two languages.

A huge idiomatic phraseological corpus has been found in each language [Jung 2003]. Thanks to this discovery, it is possible

to compare the existing phraseologemes in different languages [Puerto 2015]. An example below shows how the phraseologemes in Spanish with corresponding phraseological expressions in Hindi can be helpful while understanding the relation between these two languages.

Example:

En el país de los ciegos, el tuerto es rey.

(Significado: Se valora al mediocre si hay ninguno con valor).

‘अंधों में काना राजा’

Didactic analogies

Using Hindi while teaching Spanish shows that there are many grammatical phenomena where these two languages coincide. Let us have a look at some of the categories where similarities occur.

(i) B — ब / व

The letter ‘b’ in Spanish has two different sounds in different regions of the Hispanic world. Students find it difficult to understand the variation in the pronunciation of this letter. Hindi shows a promising way here as one can explain through its use that in Spain people mostly use ‘ब’ to pronounce ‘b’ and people in Latin America use ‘व’ to pronounce the same letter.

(ii) Fulano — फलाना

Interestingly, there are always words in different languages that do not just share similar meaning but also similar phonology. An apt example here is the word *fulano* in Spanish which is similar to the word ‘फलाना’ in Hindi. These words also have similar connotations.

(iii) Syntax

Let us take *estudiar* as an example. However, any other verb in Spanish shares the similar verb structure and subject verb agreement with Hindi.

The verb *Estudiar* – ‘To study’

Yo estudio ‘मैं पढ़ता हूँ।’

Tú estudias ‘तुम पढ़ते हो।’

(iv) Preterite and Imperfect

One of the complex areas while teaching Spanish grammar is the difference between the preterite and the imperfect. Hindi offers some relief here as there is a distinction which can be used to draw analogies.

Él fue al colegio. ‘वह स्कूल गया।’

Él iba al colegio. ‘वह स्कूल जाया करता था।’

(v) *Gustar*

In English, we express liking with phrases *I like* or *You like*, which is not the case in Spanish. There, just like it is in Hindi, the conjugation of the verb *Gustar* aligns with the object of the sentence. Another interesting feature is that in English, we use subject pronouns right when we start the sentence whereas in Hindi and in Spanish, we use indirect object pronouns.

Le /Gusta / gustan ‘उसे / आपको पसंद है / हैं’

(vi) Articles

Since Hindi and Spanish are languages that do not belong to the same family and the uses they make of elements such as determinants are not always similar, comparing them could help students in a significant way.

One of the basic rules that usually generates errors is related to the body parts. In this case the Spanish prefers the article to the possessives [Rodríguez, Kumar 2020]:

Example: *Yo me lavo los dientes por la mañana.*

In these cases, Hindi prefers the possessive to any other structure that includes some kind of indirect reference to the person:

‘मैं सुबह अपने दाँत साफ़ करता/करती हूँ’

Yo lavo mis dientes por la mañana

The same is also studied with a transcategorizing value next to adjectives in those cases in which we omit the noun if it is well known by the speakers, as we see in the following example:

- *¿Te gusta la chaqueta negra?*
- *Me gusta más la azul.*

In Hindi this procedure is carried out in a similar way although it is preceded by ‘वाला / वाली’ to refer to what is already known [Rodríguez, Kumar 2020]:

- ‘तुम्हें काली जैकेट पसंद है?’
- ‘मुझे नीली वाली ज्यादा पसंद है’

Conclusion

Teaching Spanish or any other foreign language without taking help of any other language is like learning to drive but without any instructor by our side. Taking help will speed things up and that is why bilingualism has to be approached extensively to reap its benefits while learning another language. It is not just about learning a language but acquiring the requisite skills as fast as we can. There is another benefit to it. While using our own mother tongue, we become aware of our own identities that were probably there but not visible to us.

Furthermore, the contrastive phraseological analysis between Spanish and Hindi highlights both similarities and differences in metaphorical thinking and proverbs. The advantages of teaching Spanish through Hindi cannot be overlooked. Recognizing these linguistic intersections can offer a more effective and engaging approach to teaching a foreign language using mother tongue. Using a language to learn another one will not hamper the process but enrich it.

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