

# ELTWeekly

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**Rainy Dinot School Jaabor Mon Naathaake, Kintu Nogole Midday Meal Miss Karu-je...**

*(We don't feel like going to school on a rainy day, but if we don't go we miss the midday meal)*

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## **Objectives**

We carried out an exploratory study to find out if children's word and world knowledge of L1 (Assamese) help in developing their L2 vocabulary (English)? If yes, then how can their L1 vocabulary knowledge be used?

## **What we know now about the bilingual mind**

- Languages are not learnt independently of each other.
- Certain aspects of proficiency are shared across languages (Cummins, 1991)
- Using L1 in L2 bridges structural distance between systems, reduces cognitive dissonance, and enriches the expressive and referential resources (Sridhar, 1994)
- Concrete nouns have fixed reference and are easily transferred from L1 to L2 (De Groot, 1992)
- Code switching reflects language development

## **Different Viewpoints: Use of L1 in L2 learning**

- L1 an obstacle to mastering L2.
- L1 neglected resource in the classroom (Atkinson, 1987)

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- L1 a social/emotional need (Pattanayak, 1986)
- L1 a cognitive load reducing resource (Auerbach, 1993).

## How L1 is used in the L2 classroom?

- To explain meaning of unfamiliar words/expressions, and grammar
- To reduce anxiety
- For classroom management and task organization
- To check comprehension
- To provide explanation of errors
- To motivate learners elicit language (at all levels)

## A Sketch of the School

The school is under the state government and is run under the aegis of Sarva Shiksha Aviyan (Education for All), Assam.

The total school population is 25 in all. Located in the heart of the village, near on the main road,



it is a small Assam type building with space in front which serves as a playground. It has in all 4 classrooms and a common toilet for use. Children in Classes I and II are expected to sit on the floor, the

older children have benches and tables. The classrooms have wide windows and proper

ventilation furnished with a blackboard, and a table and chair for the teacher. However, the school has no electricity, no library.

The school is run by two teachers: one who teaches in Classes 1 and 2, and the head teacher (the principal for all practical purposes) runs the school. The head teacher of the school is a matriculate with some basic teacher training experience. He has 4 years of teaching experience and teaches all the subjects to class IV and has many administrative & official responsibilities. He comes from the same village, and speaks the same dialect as students.

## **Profile of Children in Class IV**

There were 9 students (5 boys & 4 girls) of class IV:  
all between the age group of 10-12 years.

They understand little English: with a vocabulary of 50-75 words. They can write simple words like *cat*, *ball*, *bus* and can spell words from their textbooks.



They have had a year's exposure to English, since its introduction in Class III.

They can read and write Assamese, and can read short texts, stories, even newspapers in Assamese.

The students were generally subdued and talk very little in class. Once the bell rings, they suddenly turn talkative and chirpy: now they can talk in Bajaali, the language of the playground.

Children mostly come from low income group families: the mothers work at home and the fathers are usually small farmers, daily wage workers, carpenters etc. The parents are concerned about their children's education, though many are not literate.

At home, children spend time taking care of their siblings, running errands for their parents, doing odd household chores. When they are free, they watch television and sometimes read stories in Assamese.

## **Methodology of teaching**

I tried to use the mother tongue as a trigger for thinking about texts/poems. The prior knowledge was utilized for L2 learning. I taught 20 classes.

To activate background knowledge, I used pictures, word maps, local contexts, real objects and printed texts in Assamese.

### ***Vocabulary related to:***

Time; day; weather; family; human body; direction; classroom objects

### ***Basic grammatical rules,***

Simple present; past tense; deictic like 'this' and 'that'; apostrophe s

### ***Basic language functions***

Introducing yourself; saying hello; saying thank you; talking about oneself

### ***Reading***

Pause in reading aloud; reading for meaning

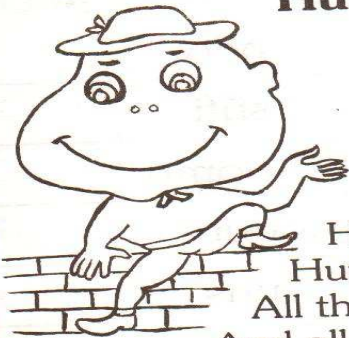
### ***Writing***

Use of full stop; space between words

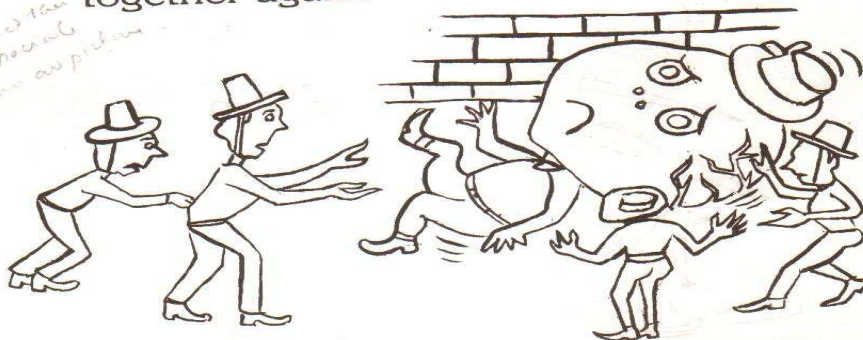
## Sample Page from the textbook

L. Let's recite :

### Humpty Dumpty



Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall  
All the king's horses  
And all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty  
together again.



#### A brief look at the prescribed textbook: **Beginners' English II**

Beginners' English-II (1999), a textbook-cum-work book was used in the class. The textbook was pictorial and activity oriented. Activities are as follows:

- Letter recognition activity
- Number recognition activity
- Rearranging letters to make meaningful words
- Reciting rhymes with actions individually or in groups
- Role-play activities (for e.g. introducing oneself and carrying out simple instructions in English).

## Sample: Lesson 1

**Objective:** Vocabulary related to 'Time' e. g. morning, noon, evening, night

Teacher: tumaaloke samaya-k ingraajit ki buli koi

jaanaa ne?

*Do you know the English word for SAMAYA?*

Student: jaanu sir, **TIME**

*Yes, sir. TIME*

Teacher: **TIME**-r lagat samparka thaakaa kibaa

aaro words jaanaa neki?

*Any words related to TIME?*

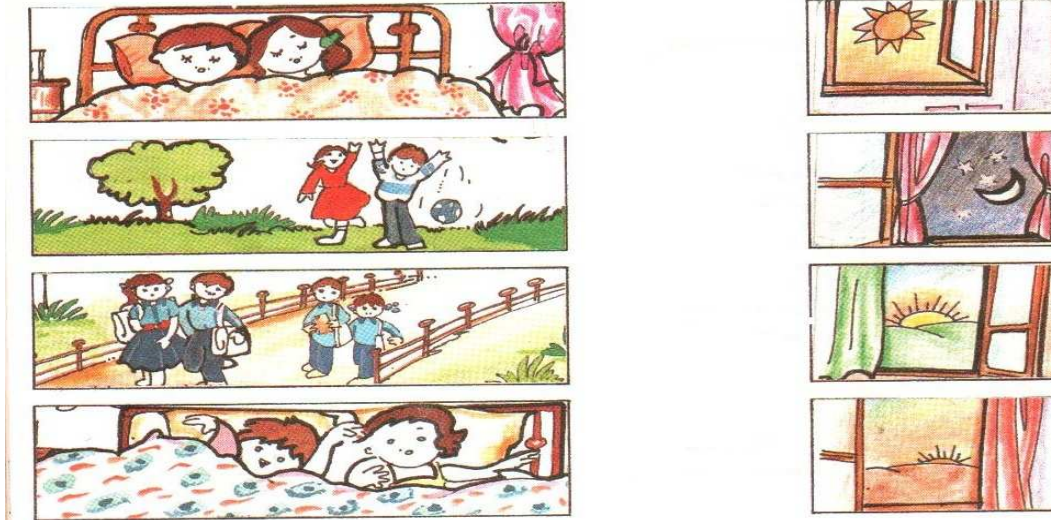
Students: najaanu sir.

*No, sir. We don't know.*

Teacher: *(showed some pictures of sunrise, sunset, a moon appearing in the sky).*

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Students: raatipuwa (**morning**)

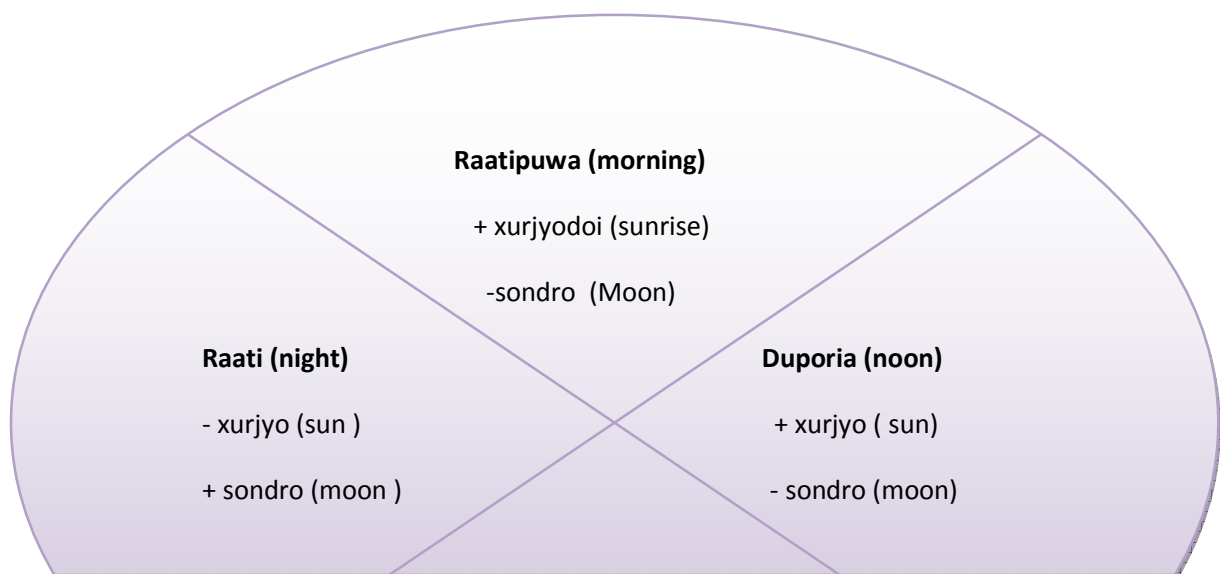
duporia (**noon**)

raati (**night**)

They were unable to give the English equivalents for the above Assamese words. Therefore, the teacher supplied those English words, e.g. morning, noon, evening, night.

I then described these time periods in relationship to the sun and the moon. Explanations given were:

- in the **morning** the sun rises,
- at **noon** the sun is high up in the sky and
- at **night** the sun sets and the moon appears.



## Diagram drawn on the blackboard

### What did the children learn?

Children were just beginning to pick up words and to use them in sentences. The basic structure of their sentences was still Assamese, interspersed with the newly learnt English words. Here are some sentences the children produced:

- moi **morning** daat **brush** karu.

*I brush my teeth in the morning*

- **evening** besi khelile **night-t** xonkale tupani dhare.

*If I play too much in the evening, I feel sleepy at night*



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We observe here an attempt by the children to incorporate the newly acquired L2 vocabulary in utterances, which are primarily Assamese. This is a universally acknowledged strategy used by early L2 learners, where the syntax becomes from the L1, and the vocabulary from the L2.

There is an attempt to be faithful to the L1 morphological structure. Note that they have not used a suffixation to represent 'in' for 'morning' and 'evening'. However, for 'night' a morpheme '-t' (in) is added, as would be done in the case of L1.

We also find that the placement of the adverbs is also in accordance with Assamese.

## Sample: Lesson 2:

### Deictic markers 'This' and 'That'

Teacher: **this** aaru **that** kot bebohaar kariba laage jaanaa ne nai?

How do we use **this** and **that** in English?

Students: najaanu sir.

We don't know sir.

Teacher: eito/eikhan/eijan (this) aaru xeito/xeikhan/xeijan (that) kot use kore jaanaa ne?

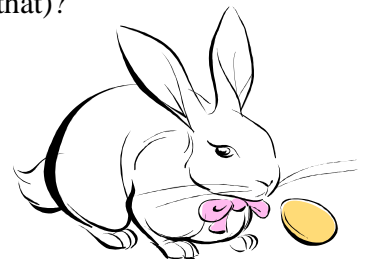
How about eito/eikhan/eijan (this) and xeito/xeikhan/xeijan (that)?

Students: jaanu sir.

Yes, sir

Student 1: (*drew the picture of a rabbit*) eito xohaa

This is a rabbit.



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Student 2: xeito saati (*pointing to an umbrella which was far away from the student*).

That is an umbrella.

The students knew that according to distance that had to be indicated, they need to use **this** and **that**. When somebody/something is “near” they use eito/eikhan/eijan (this) and when somebody/something is “far” they use xeito/xeikhan/xeijan (that).

**After a week**, when the teacher entered the class, one student uttered:

- This is sir. That is Mukul (one of the student’s name).
- This is *siror* pen. (This is sir’s pen) pointing to teacher’s pen in the pocket.
- That is duwaar. (That is door) pointing to the door of the classroom.

## Teaching implications

If a teacher systematically exploits students’ word and world knowledge in Assamese (L1) before introducing the related English words, it registers in students’ minds effectively and easily.

Since in this classroom a single teacher handled all the subjects, he could draw ideas from various disciplines and use those concepts when teaching English.

Students felt that their existing knowledge of L1 had a place in learning another new language which reduced the fear and anxiety of the learning process.

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