
HOW I HAPPENED TO BECOME A NEPANGGLISH TEACHER: USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY FOR EFFECTIVE ELT IN THE EFL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *This report is based on my autoethnography on ELT in the EFL context for some 10 years. It mainly deals with the contradictions existed between ELT theories and practices imported from the native language context and highlighted in the EFL context. The core part of this report is my autoethnography which is related to my experiment with CLT in the Nepalese context and my transformation from English teacher to Nepanglish one. The findings of my autoethnography show that CLT becomes no more effective and productive in the EFL context like in Nepal unless it is modified. Thus, it aims at drawing the ELT practitioners' attention to use autoethnography as a research method in order to make ELT more effective and creative in the Asian context where English is mostly used as a foreign language. As Chang's (2007) autoethnography suggests, autoethnography as method can help teachers/researchers to understand themselves and others, and make teaching of multicultural education more effective (p. 12).*

KEYWORDS: autoethnography; CLT; EFL context; eclectic approach; Nepanglish

INTROUCTION

The status of English in Nepal is that of foreign language as it is hardly used for daily communication. It is mainly used as a lingua franca, a medium language for international communication. It also does not have that long history of academic practice. English was formally introduced to the school level education system in 1854 (Bhattarai, 2006, p.11). In the past Grammar Translation (GT) method was used, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, literature, reading and writing. However, after the implementation of New Education System Plan in the early 1870s, teaching of English shifted from GT method to Structural- Functional (Bhattarai, 2006, p. 12). However, practically, GT method was still in high practice. At present, CLT is highly focused as it was officially introduced to Nepalese education system in 2000 (Rai, 2003; as cited in Adhikari, 2007, p. 1). In the same vein, Hasan and Akhand (2009) argue that “the shift in the present paradigm from GTM to CLT occurred around the year 2001 in Bangladash, in 1998 in Korea, in 2001 in China, and in 1999 in Nepal (p. 45). So theoretically speaking, Nepalese English Language Teaching (ELT) at present is based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), but practically translation method is still prevalent.

My autoethnography of teaching English also proved that CLT is not appropriate to the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context. Although I practiced it in the beginning, I did not find it so effective and creative. Eventually, I shifted from CLT to translation and then to eclectic method which proved to be more effective and creative in the EFL context. Then, I realized myself as a Nepanglish teacher. Similarly, Chang's (2007) autoethnography also suggests that autoethnography as method can help teachers/researchers to understand

themselves and others better and make teaching of multicultural education more effective (p. 12). This suggests that autoethnography can be used as a method in order to make ELT more effective in the EFL context like in Nepal. Thus, this paper presents the fact that any method (including CLT) does not work as it is in the EFL context because local realities count more on teaching and learning than what is prescribed! It means any method should be contextualized in order to make it more effective and creative.

This report contains three major parts. The first part deals with autoethnography as a research method that can be applied in the field of ELT; the second part deals with my autoethnography that is mainly concerned with my experiment with CLT in the Nepalese context; and the last part presents major findings of my autoethnography. On the whole, this paper presents the fact that teachers teaching English in Nepal are Nepanglish teachers, and using autoethnography helps them enhance their professional development.

Autoethnography as a Research Method

Autoethnography is the latest development in the field of qualitative study. The term "autoethnography" was first introduced by the anthropologist, Heider in 1975 (Chang, 2007, p. 2). As the name suggests, autoethnography contains three ingredients: auto (self), ethno (culture), and graphy (research process), (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, as cited in Chang, 2007, p. 3). So, autoethnography refers to the research process which studies self in the specific cultural context. As a research method, autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, as cited in Duarte, 2007, p. 2). In Ellis and Bochner's (2000) view autoethnography presents how a person adjusts to his cultural context through his dynamic consciousness process. But, for Chang (2007) autoethnography should be ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation (p. 3).

According to Spry (2001), "Autoethnography is a self- narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social context" (as cited in Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764). In this definition, we can clearly observe that critical narration of self, grounded on culture, is the methodology of autoethnography. I have referred to this methodology as "Emotional Criticism" (Bhakta, 2013) in my anthology "Sa-Si : The Postmodern Prometheus" (p. 74). In the same vein, Wall (2006) argues that autoethnography is "an emerging qualitative method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experiences to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon" (p. 146). So, methodology in autoethnography can differ from researcher to researcher as its process is highly personalized and contextualized.

Autoethnographic research can also be used in the field of education. In Bass's (1999) view, autoethnography in teaching and learning includes "many complex layers of one's practice as a teacher in order to investigate and analyze the complexities of teaching and learning (as cited in Duarte, 2007, p. 2). Following Bass, we can claim that autoethnography is a more useful research method that can help teachers to identify their problems and solve them. In the same vein, this report is completely based on my autoethnography as a research method.

Regarding the research process in autoethnography, Chang (2007) states that it undergoes the usual ethnographic research processes: data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and report writing (p. 4).

Data in autoethnography are known as “field texts” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; as cited in Chang, 2007, p. 4). Field texts contain information as experience that is “elicited from the researcher's use of the subjective self” (Wall, 2006, p. 155). So, ethnographic data are situated within the autoethnographer's personal experience and sense making (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003; as cited in Anderson, 2006 p. 386). For the collection of field text, memory is used as a tool which selects, shapes, limits, and distorts information (Chang, 2007, p.5). As memory is the tool of field texts collection in autoethnography, it should be verified with critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes by oneself (Chang, 2007). In other words, in collecting field texts, we must be “Emotional- an appropriate balance between emotional and rational state of a personality” (Bhakta, 2013, p. 77). Holman Jones also agrees with this point and says that “autoethnography is a balancing act” (2005, p. 764).

With respect to data analysis and interpretation in autoethnography, Chang (2007) maintains that after the collection of field texts, analysis/ interpretation follows sequentially, or sometimes it is also natural to occur them together as these two research processes are interconnected (p. 5). So, it is also natural in autoethnography that collection of field texts and their interpretation can go simultaneously. Report writing or autoethnographic writing is the final process in which the researcher writes the story /autoethnography incorporating his/her own feelings and experiences which make the researcher a highly visible social actor (Anderson, 2006, p. 384). So, narration of the researcher's self in relation to the particular event and its outcome constitute the main portion in autoethnography.

In writing autoethnography, Durante (2007) states that “it begins with a descriptive narrative of events and activities that unfold within a particular culture and then develops into a reflective analysis of these events and activities to generate new insights and to enhance the researcher's sensitivity towards the knowledge gained in the process” (p. 2). Durante's views on autoethnography suggests that it includes mainly two processes: description of events and activities, and reflection from them. Similarly, Chang (2007) argues that autoethnographic research process can be broken down into two interconnected, not always sequential, steps: (1) Composing autobiographical field texts, and (2) turning autobiographical field texts into autoethnography (p. 5).

My Autoethnography on ELT in the EFL Context

This autoethnography contains my experience of teaching English to the college students in the EFL context for the last 10 years. As I was trained in CLT, I believed it to be more effective for teaching English than the other methods. I practiced it in my classrooms- I used student-centered activities, maximized Student Talking Time (STT), minimized Teacher Talking Time (TTT), and acted as a facilitator in setting up communicative activities and as an advisor during their activities ((Harmer, 2007, p. 38). My focus was to enable students to communicate in the target language and make them responsible managers of their own learning (Larsen- Freeman, 2000, p. 129), and my desired goal of teaching English was to

develop communicative competence in them. As CLT is believed to be the best method of teaching English, I adhered to this strictly.

I continued my practice for CLT for about 5 years with many challenges. Later on, I grew dissatisfied with the outcomes of my practice. My status at college got worse and worse as the number of students in my class was decreasing by far because students did not like my class. It is true that success of a class depends “on how students view the individual teacher” (Harmer, 2007, p. 23). This resulted in suspicion of my expertise in ELT among my colleges, students and college administrators. I knew there was no truth about what they said and thought of my professional skills. I knew very well what went wrong. However, I continued experimenting with CLT in my classes. Now and again, I had crises. So I thought whether I should quit my experimentation with CLT, or should I modify it to suit the EFL context! The moment was as Holman Jones (2005) said, “A crisis is a turning point, a moment when conflict must be dealt with even if we cannot resolve it.” (p. 766). I tried my best to manage the crises and continued practicing for CLT without losing any confidence and hope; I listened to every comment from my colleagues “emotionally”- thinking and doing something with proper balance between emotional and rational dynamics of a personality.

As the days passed, my practice for CLT got worse and worse, it did not help me to achieve the desired goals; I grew more and more dissatisfied with my experiment. And, finally, I declared to quit teaching at the college, concluding that complexities of my pertaining situation was primarily because of my differences with my colleagues and college administrators in terms of practicing CLT in teaching and learning, because all the English teachers were practicing translation method to which the students were mostly accustomed. In this regard, CLT was practically new and challenging to my students as well as teachers. I thought emotionally and concluded that there was actually no wrong with CLT but all my crises were the result of my differences with my students and colleagues in terms of social, cultural, linguistic, and methodological variations. In such situation, it was impossible for me to continue my experiment with CLT in the same college. So, lastly, I left the college without any formal resignation.

For a month I was really in a great tension. I visited different places and experts and consulted with them if I could get the environment where I could experiment with CLT. I learnt from them that it was hardly possible to go that way, except in some English medium academic institutions. Then, I thought emotionally and managed everything myself. It was like the moment, as Reinelt (1998) argues, “that opens up a space of indeterminacy, threatens to destabilize social structure, and enables a creative uncertainty” (as cited in Holman Jones, 2005, p. 766). Accordingly, I tried my best to discover the creative uncertainty inherent in this critical moment.

After a month of my quitting the college, I reviewed my experiment with CLT, denial of translation method, disregard for local realities/EFL context), and my cultural differences with the locale where I had been teaching. Then, I remember Harmer (2007) who said, “It is one of the characteristics of good teachers that they are constantly changing and developing their teaching practices, as a result of reflecting on their teaching practices” (p. 28). I realized that it was not good idea to quit the college as the context of teaching English is the same

everywhere in Nepal, except in some English- medium private institutions! Lastly, I decided to resume my teaching practice at the same college but differently.

When I resumed my teaching, my position at the college was worse- every colleague and administrator was suspicious of me! However, after a few days' idleness, I started teaching with the belief that "any method is going to be shaped by a teacher's own understanding, beliefs, styles, and levels of experiences" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. x). As suggested by Larsen-Freeman, I modified CLT, considering the local realities, to suit the EFL context. First, I started using L1 whenever I felt it was necessary because "where teacher and students share the same L1, it would be foolish to deny its existence and potential value" (Harmer, 2000, p. 39). Besides, I also followed common practice for teaching English that the colleagues and students were accustomed to. I used any method and technique considering its "particularity, practicality, and possibility" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) in the EFL context (as cited in Hasan and Akhand, 2009, p. 53). I also practiced adjusting to their culture. Then everything got better and better. The number of students in my class started increasing. My colleagues, administrators, and students had positive attitudes towards me, and I was really satisfied with my modified teaching practice that highly focused on teaching of English in the EFL context. In course of time, my colleagues and administrators accepted me as an experienced, qualified, and established teacher. And I realized that I was transformed from English teacher to Nepanglish one! I also started arguing that Nepanglish should be standardized as a variety of English and wrote an article entitled "*Nepanglish : A Standardizing Variety of English*". Then, later on I presented a paper at the International Conference of NELTA on "*How I Happened to Become a Nepanglish Teacher*," focusing on the teaching of English appropriate to the Nepalese context. This report is actually an elaboration of this paper based on "autoethnography as method" (Chang, 2007). Now my teaching practice is based on what Cohan (2008) says, "Is there a single most effective approach for teaching ESL/EFL? The answer is no, or more precisely, it depends on who your students are" (p. 49).

CONCLUSION

On the basis of my autoethnography which is the result of my experiment with CLT, I came to the conclusion that:

- Autoethnography, as a research method, helps teachers to construct, distort, and implicate their selves in order to adjust and proceed in any adverse circumstances (Holman Jones, 2005). It also helps teachers in increasing self-reflection, self-healing, and transforming themselves into adoption of the culturally relevant pedagogy (Chang, 2007, p. 14). These views on autoethnography highlight the fact that it can really help teachers to enhance their expertise in teaching and become a professional teacher.
- In teaching English in the EFL context, local realities should be highly considered because "how a method is implemented in the classroom is going to be affected not only by who the teacher is, but also by who the students are, their and teacher's expectation of appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demands, and factors connected to the wider social-cultural context in which the instruction takes place" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. x). So we need not stick to any single method. Instead, we should use

eclectic approach in teaching English which incorporates local realities and makes teaching and learning of English more effective and creative in the EFL context.

- All the teachers teaching English in Nepal are not the English teachers but Nepanglish ones because what we are teaching is not English but Nepanglish. So, it is natural that we should standardize Nepanglish as a variety of English as we think of world Englishes, not world English, (Kamali, 2010). Similarly, different varieties of English should be encouraged to grow in the Asian countries because standardizing national variety of English helps to preserve cultural heritage, and teaching and learning of such variety of English will be more effective and creative.
- Teachers should be most emotional which helps them to maintain proper balance between their emotional and rational aspects of personality (Bhakta, 2013, p. 77). This helps them to remain peaceful and creative. Actually, practicing autoethnography makes teachers emotional which, in turn, helps them to develop professionally.

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