# L1 ASSISTANCE AND L2 SPEAKING: A VOCABULARY-BASED STUDY

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## Abstract

*This study examines the impact of **L1 assistance on L2 speaking skills** among **third-year B.Sc. Chemistry students (Tamil medium) at Rajah Serfoji Government College.** A total of **14 students** participated, divided into a **control group (7 students)** and an **experimental group (7 students).** The study focused on **enhancing speaking skills through vocabulary instruction** using The Gift of the Magi and words such as parsimony, mendicancy, and pier glass. Conducted over **five contact hours,** the experimental group received **Tamil explanations**, while the control group learned solely in English. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group, supporting **Dell Hymes' theory,** which emphasizes ‘meaning over form’. The findings suggest that **L1 assistance enhances vocabulary retention and confidence**, leading to improved **L2 communication skills.***
*Keywords: tasks, L1 assistance, parsimony, mendicancy, and pier glass etc.*

## Introduction

Speaking is a crucial component of second language (L2) acquisition, requiring learners to develop fluency, accuracy, and confidence. However, many Tamil-medium students studying in higher education institutions face difficulties in L2 speaking due to limited exposure, lack of vocabulary, and the absence of meaningful interactions. Vocabulary plays a vital role in improving speaking skills, as it enables learners to express ideas clearly and effectively. This study aims to examine the impact of L1 (Tamil) assistance on enhancing L2 speaking skills through targeted vocabulary instruction using The Gift of the Magi. The research follows Dell Hymes' communicative competence theory, which emphasizes meaning over form, suggesting that understanding words in context improves language proficiency.

Nation (2001) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge is fundamental for language use, stating that a rich vocabulary improves fluency and communicative ability. Without adequate vocabulary, learners struggle to construct meaningful sentences, leading to hesitation in speech. This study incorporates vocabulary instruction as a means to improve students' speaking performance. Cook (2001) discussed the positive role of L1 in L2 learning, arguing that it serves as a cognitive tool for understanding complex language structures. He stated that L1 assistance helps learners comprehend L2 concepts faster by providing a familiar linguistic framework. This study applies L1 assistance to analyze its impact on L2 speaking skills.

Ellis (2003) proposed that task-based learning enhances speaking proficiency by creating real-life communication scenarios. He argued that interactive tasks, such as role-plays, storytelling, and discussions, facilitate language acquisition. This study adopts task-based vocabulary learning to assess improvements in L2 speaking. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, highlighting that language learners should focus on conveying meaning rather than linguistic perfection. He suggested that real-world communication is more important than rigid grammar rules. This study aligns with Hymes' theory by prioritizing meaning-focused speaking activities.

Auerbach (1993) found that students who receive L1 support in the early stages of L2 learning perform better in vocabulary retention and communication. His study revealed that bilingual instructional methods reduce anxiety and enhance comprehension. This research applies a similar experimental approach, comparing the performance of a control group (English-only instruction) and an experimental group (L1-assisted instruction). This study builds on the above research by analyzing the role of L1 assistance in vocabulary-based speaking tasks and

evaluating its impact on Tamil-medium students' L2 proficiency.

## Methodology

The study followed a **quasi-experimental design** with **14 third-year B.Sc. Chemistry students** (Tamil medium) from **Rajah Serfoji Government College,** divided into a **control group (7 students)** and an **experimental group (7 students).** The objective was to enhance **L2 speaking skills through vocabulary instruction,** using *The Gift of the Magi* and selected words such as *parsimony, mendicancy,* and *pier glass*. The experiment was conducted over **five contact hours,** with the **experimental group receiving L1 (Tamil) assistance,** while the **control group relied solely on English instruction.** Both groups participated in activities such as **reading aloud, contextual discussions, role-plays, story retelling, and Q&A sessions.** The **pre-test and post-test assessments** evaluated speaking skills based on **fluency (5 marks), expanding ideas (4 marks), and grammar (1 mark).** Results showed that the **experimental group outperformed the control group,** demonstrating better vocabulary retention and confidence in speaking. The findings align with **Dell Hymes' theory,** emphasizing that **"meaning is more important than form",** as L1 assistance helped students grasp the vocabulary contextually, leading to improved L2 communication.

## Results and Discussions

The results of the study indicate that **L1 assistance significantly improved L2 speaking skills**, particularly in fluency and vocabulary retention. The **experimental group**, which received **Tamil explanations** for vocabulary, performed better than the **control group**, demonstrating greater confidence and coherence in speech. The post-test scores revealed that the experimental group excelled in **fluency (5 marks) and expanding ideas (4 marks),** while both groups showed similar performance in **grammar (1 mark)**. This aligns with **Dell Hymes' theory**, which emphasizes that **meaning is more important than form** in communication. The findings also support **Cook (2001) and Auerbach (1993)**, who argued that **L1 support enhances comprehension and reduces learner anxiety.** Additionally, the **experimental group integrated target vocabulary more effectively**, reinforcing **Nation's (2001) view** that vocabulary knowledge is crucial for speaking proficiency. These results suggest that **strategic use of L1 in vocabulary instruction** can be a valuable approach to enhancing L2 speaking skills.

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