

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION AND LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE CONTEXT

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Abstract

The prime purpose of this study was to explore a correlation between bilingual instruction in an ESL class and the class performance of the ESL learners at the secondary level. Quantitative research method was used to evaluate the test performance of 60 ESL learners divided into two groups: One was the controlled group (which was given instructions in L2 only) and the other was the treatment group (which was given instructions in both L1 and L2) in Public School settings. Apart from the students, 15 language teachers' feedback upon their perceptions of L1 usage in L2 classrooms was taken by using the Likert scale feedback forms. The results confirmed that the instructions given bilingually are directly associated to improved learner outcomes and teachers' responses for the usage of L1 in classrooms showed a strong positive response.

Keywords: bilingual instructions, learner performance, mixed coding, second language

Introduction

English is Pakistan's second and official language (Schiffman, 2003) as it is one of those colonial countries of the past where British raj introduced it in schools as a second language. Pakistan comes in the group of countries where even the illiterate can understand English vocabulary to an extent (Rahman, 2001). Since it is the second language of the country, the language learning starts right from the kindergarten level and is a compulsory component of the cur-

riculum till K-12 level. Pakistan is basically an agricultural country where more than 80% of the population lives on agri-business in rural areas having a multicultural environment along with more than 20 languages spoken in various parts of the country (Jutting & Morrison, 2009).

The rural urban divide is another eminent element as the urban areas such as Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, and Hyderabad are the most modern cities having multistory buildings, five star hotels, multinational organizations, and highly educated people, whereas, the rural areas comprise lush green fields, livestock, and deep rooted culture having regional languages as their L1, Urdu as L2 and English as L3. Officially, Pakistan like its counterpart India, has English as its second language and it has been taught in schools right from the beginning (Tsui, 1996), but unlike India it is still facing multiple issues of teaching English language skills successfully to the young learners (Harmer, 2006; Norton, 1997; Quirk, 1990). The problem does not only lie amongst the learners who are not exposed to the language as it is not commonly present in their milieu, but also with the teachers who have a limited knowledge and grip over the language skills and are not exposed to it in their milieu. The teachers are neither exposed to their second language nor are they interested in improving it, especially in the context of public schools where the teachers are not accountable for any incompetency or inefficiency by the government authorities.

Another issue is that Pakistan is a country where mainly three different education systems are operating and are well endorsed by the masses. O-Level system has been imported from the west and is popular amongst the urban elite because of its strong English language component. The most commonly known and accepted education system is Matriculation, a government inflicted system that has a set curriculum for the beginners to the tenth grade. It is set for common masses of Pakistan and apparently is easily taught by the teachers and understood by the learners. Madrasah is the third system that has religious component as its major aspect. It has a recognition amongst the poor and underprivileged practicing Muslims, catering to the natives of a particular region. English is taught in

all three systems of education, but in different ways and in different ratio. In the urban settings, especially in the O-Level schools, English is the prime language that is used to teach most subjects. As a technical language, it calls for immersive teaching practices (Johnson & Swain, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 2005), where the teachers and students are bound to use English in and out of the classrooms. Here L2 is the only language used for all purposes, even for religious studies; whereas, in Matriculation system the learners are taught more in bilingually using L1 and L2 and for Madrasahs L1 is used mostly along with L2 in the classrooms. In the rural areas of Pakistan, even English is taught either in Urdu or the regional language (Abbas, 1993). Pakistan undergoes another confusion regarding education, as recently the provincial governments have been given powers to develop educational policies appropriate to the provincial requirements. As the classrooms have always comprised mixed ability groups because of the populace shift from one place to another or from rural to urban areas, this creates another challenge for teachers to cope with the challenges.

Teacher English language proficiency level is quite low and they face problems in teaching English or other subjects in L2. All these problems create a challenge for teachers to live up to the standards that is expected from them. Keeping the complex situation of education in Pakistan in mind and the challenges teachers face regarding the use of English L2 in the classrooms, the rationale of this study is to search for a correlation between classroom instruction language (L1 and/or L2) on the comprehension performance of the learners and their outcomes.

Literature Review

Due to the discussion surrounding the use of L1, several researches have assessed the use of L1 in L2 classrooms and these studies have investigated the extent to which L1 is used in L2 classrooms and have also explored the perceptions of language teachers and learners regarding the role of L1 in various frameworks and environments (Macaro, 2001). These studies have found that although instructors concede the significance of teaching in L2, most of them

nevertheless, use L1 to a certain extent in their own classrooms (Levine, 2003). According to Schweers (1999) there is a diverse opinion across the world regarding the use of L1 in L2 classrooms according to various settings and situations; however, researchers have been exploring several methodologies and approaches towards classroom instruction language and have found interesting facts about it. Various teaching methodologies and approaches have approved the use of L2 whereby limiting the use of L1. The use of L1 should be avoided to a greater extent as the learners are exposed to L2 in only the school environment and have no exposure in their personal milieu (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007; Tang, 2002). On the other hand, many agree to use L1 in L2 classrooms as EFL/ESL learners face enormous difficulty in understanding the instructions in L2 and expect it to be repeated in their own language. Educationists also endorse the use of L2 very strongly because of its cognitive and sociolinguistic aspects of learning (Butzkamm 1998; Cook, 2001). The significance of the issue is central to language learning issues and due to its importance for the global societies, many researches have taken place to probe the appropriate fashion in which the balance of L1 and L2 should be used. Multiple studies have been done in this regard and different perspectives have emerged that indicate various eminent aspects of language learning and the use of both L1 and L2 (Polio & Duff, 1994).

The instructor and learners' opinion and viewpoints also hold a strong position as they are the stakeholders (Mpras, 2003). The teachers and learners are limited and bound in a target that is to be achieved in the given period of time with a satisfactory level of concrete achievement in terms of the student outcomes (Macaro, 2001). The analyses of various scholars have found that the teachers and learners recognize the importance of the use of L2 to a large extent as it provides them to get language exposure and classrooms are the prime source of it. Of this significance lies the language limitations of both teachers and learners and they are being forced by their own weak language skills to use their native language to understand and comprehend the instruction. They need to incorporate L1 along with L2 to a large extent as the learners' proficiency level is quite low and they are unable to understand teachers' instructions. On the

other hand, the teachers themselves have limited language skills and are unable to give complete instructions in L2. According to a study done by Littlewood & Yu (2001), the subject of the balance between the use of L2 and L1 in an L2 classroom is complex and needs to be examined from various aspects as every part of the world has diverse issues related to classroom instructions. In Pakistan, the problem is to be dealt differently because here education is imparted through three different education systems to audience from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Multiple layers of research have been done in various parts of the world by scholars and researchers regarding the use of L1 in an L2 class. Every study is done from a different perspective and the outcome of the study has lead researchers to a diversity of results. One of the examples is a study done by Auerbach (1993) that gives a socio political rationale for the use of L1 in ESL classrooms. According to her analysis, everyday classroom practices need L1 to be used as it creates a non threatening environment for the learners and provides a comfort zone; therefore, the learners are then able to relate and understand the content in their own context. It must also be kept in mind that L1 is important for people as their language helps them to construct identities and communities (Sikandar & Hussain, 2014).

Schweers (1999) in his study interviewed students and teachers regarding the use of L1 in L2 classrooms and found a high percentage of students (87%) endorsing the use of L1 in their L2 classrooms, whereas (99%) students wanted their teachers to use only L2 in the classrooms. Nevertheless, there are researchers who argue that using L1 in L2 classrooms might create unfavorable usage of L2 by a teacher. They explain that due to the use of L1 by the teachers in a class, the probability of using L2 decreases, which results in diminishing the chances of learning, understanding, and using L2 (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Another argument that takes place is that adult L2 learning process and execution should be similar to that of a child L1 acquisition and that L2 must be immersed in a large quantity from the milieu rather than acquired through conscious efforts in a given artificial environment (Mitchell, 1988). In the light of this argument, one can figure out that these contentions may stalk from

the viewpoints that endorse the naturalistic approaches to language teaching that accentuate a focus on the engagement of learners in L2 and provide ample opportunities for exposure to the target language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Consequently, people belonging to this school of thought might assess the use of L1 as the feature of the old-fashioned grammar translation method that primarily focuses on translating from L2 to L1 as a source of learning L2 (Polio & Duff, 1994).

It can be concluded that the issue of using L1 or L2 in a teaching process demands more research as there are both opponents and proponents of L1 usage in a classroom setting. Both these groups have their reasons to oppose or propose the usage of L1. The current study needs to explore the students' performance in the classroom where only L2 is used as the medium of instruction and where L1 and L2 both are used as a medium of instruction. Based on the above literature review the following hypothesis is formed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between bilingual instruction and students' performance

Hypothesis 2: Teachers show a strong positive response in using L1 along with L2 for task instructions.

Research Design

The purpose of this research was to investigate the helpfulness of bilingual instructions in an L2 class. Quantitative paradigm for the study was chosen. A comparative analysis was conducted to compare the two instruction types: Bilingual instruction (L1 and L2) and monolingual instruction (L2).

Participants

60 public school students (39 females and 21 males, age range 13.5 - 15.5) were selected to participate in the study along with 15 language teachers (9 female and 6 male) teaching at the secondary level from the public sector to express their views about the ratio

of L1 and L2 usage in the classrooms. The participants came from various backgrounds having varying language proficiency depending upon their diverse academic and family background. Since the public schools usually do not have a culture of using L2 as the medium of instruction (according to the literature review) in the ESL classrooms because of the low proficiency level of students as well as the teachers; therefore, it was decided to execute the study only in public schools so that the study could obtain reliable and substantial data.

Instrument and Data Collection

Two tools were used: A questionnaire for the teachers prepared for the study purpose and a comprehension test for the students. The questionnaire had questions pertaining to the teachers' perspectives of using L1 in L2 classrooms. Likert scale feedback forms consisted of demographic information from the teachers to find out about their qualifications, experience, gender, mother tongue, and the number of ELT training sessions they had attended, whereas the second part of the questionnaire had questions regarding their perceptions.

The comprehension test for the students was developed to check their understanding of the instructions. Researchers find it to be the easiest way of assessing students learning outcomes for a quantitative research method. The data were collected in one session in the middle of fall and spring semesters. The participants of controlled and experimental groups were placed separately in two classrooms and individually received the passage worksheets and were given as much time as was essential to complete the passage. Each group had 30 participants. Teachers were given a comprehensive set of checklist regarding classroom instructions and class conduct. Rubrics were given to the teachers to calculate the outcome of this exercise. The consent of the school administration and teachers were taken before hand in order to make them part of the study. The permission for the student group was also taken from the school administration and their parents.

Data Analysis

SPSS version 17 was used and inferential statistics were used to apply the tests. The data were initially compiled in Word-excel and were later transferred on SPSS.

Ethical Consideration

Consent was taken from the selected school management on their letterhead for record. The concerned authorities showed keen interest in the study and allowed the researcher to proceed with the procedures.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1 was approved as there was a significant positive correlation between the use of mother tongue L1 in L2 classrooms with a two tailed t-test as a measure of non-parametric hypothesis testing at 0.05 level of significance with $n = 30$. The t-test value read as $t(34) = 3.40$, $p < .001$, with intervention group receiving higher scores than comparative. This confirmed that the instructions given bilingually are directly associated to improved learning outcomes.

Table 1. The mean difference between the controlled and experimental groups

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	df	Sig	
Intervention	30	11.17	1.783	34.308	29	.000	
Students' performance	Comparative	30	7.47	2.300	17.778	29	.000

As for hypothesis 2, it was concluded that the teachers highly endorsed bilingual instructions for their learners as they are familiar with the social setup of Pakistan where both the languages are used in various ratios. Therefore, the findings approve the hypothesis de-

veloped for the study for the learner outcomes due to monolingual and bilingual instruction and for the teachers' comfort level in giving instructions bilingually.

The findings showed that the results supporting the hypothesis that bilingual instructions help learners to understand the task and they are then able to perform better (Chamot & O'malley, 1987). There are socio cultural aspects of the findings as learners are deeply acquainted with the mother tongue L1 and because L2 being the second language of the country the students are familiar with the diction used by the teachers to instruct them; therefore, the results are better of the group where instructions were given L1 and L2 (Lotherington, 2012). Here the strong correlation between bilingual instructions and students' better performance depends upon the social background of the learners as they have grown up listening to bilingual conversations in their milieu and they have also seen both the languages present in the written form as well (Walqui, 2006). Though they are familiar with L2 diction to an extent, yet L1 is the most dominating language they have come across. Learners are psychologically comfortable in receiving instructions in their L1 along with L2 as they are clear in understanding about the task they have to perform (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Learners, as evident are more acquainted with L1 and are able to understand the instructions in their own mother tongue, so their reassurance about the instructions is to receive it bilingually.

Learners' performance is at its best when they emotionally feel secure in doing a task and use L1 as it makes them feel secure and safe (Aveni, 2005). The results showed the emotional comfort of the learners in performing better as the instructions were in L1 and L2. Bilingual instruction improves understanding of the instructions and they perform without being confused and perform better academically.

Teachers' response regarding the usage of L1 in L2 classrooms showed a strong positive correlation in using L1 along with L2 for task instructions (Macaro, 2001). Teachers highly endorsed bilingual instruction for their learners as they were familiar with the

social setup of Pakistan, where both the languages are used in various ratios. Teachers' performance is evaluated in terms of learners' academic achievements and improvements and the result of this study showed the effectiveness in the classrooms through learner outcomes (Comelius-White, 2007). They use L1 as a tool in their classrooms to provide clarity to their instructions and students to work in a non-threatening comfortable environment and keep on code switching as per the requirement and learners' comprehension. At the same time they hope their learners will use more and more L2 in the classrooms and get command over the language.

In summary, the findings showed that the language teachers used a noticeable amount of L1 in their language classes and this was done for specific and significant instructional reasons. For the teachers who used L1 in L2 classrooms, L1 played a significant role in their teaching methodology as they used it as a pedagogical tool.

Conclusion

The study worked upon the usage of L1 in L2 classrooms and its correlation with learners' performance. The findings of the study could be a guideline for language policy makers in the educational institutes regarding classroom language and the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. The use of L1 should not be taken as a weak pedagogical move, but as a powerful tool to be used in the language classrooms. In Pakistan, policy makers insist upon using only L2 for the instructions to improve the weak language skills, but they tend to overlook the learners' limitations. The study; therefore, provides evidence for the teachers to consider the use of L1 in the language classrooms as it brings positive learner outcomes. The argument might arise that a variety of factors influence language teachers' decision to use L1 in L2 classrooms and this may vary from context to context and teacher to teacher. Some factors might be based on personal beliefs about language learning and teaching, classroom settings, students' ability and interest to learn the language, and the type of syllabus offered. In such cases, teacher training programs may offer substantial help to develop awareness of the different roles that L1 could play in L2 teaching and therefore, groom the trainees to reflect on their own teaching practices to make effective use of L1 in their L2 classes.

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