The Use of Mother Tongue in Teaching and Learning of Second Language (English) at the Higher Secondary Level in Islamabad

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Abstract

The role of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is an important issue in second language teaching and learning and needs to be researched. The objective of this study is to investigate the use of the mother tongue in teaching and learning of second language, in this case the teaching and learning of English language at the Higher Secondary level at the Federal Government Educational Institutions in the capital territory of Islamabad. It attempts to explore the situation at government educational institutions in regard to the use of mother tongue. I used mixed method approach in this research. Questionnaire for teachers, questionnaire for students and classroom observation sheet were used for the collection of data in this study. The sample of the study comprised 400 Intermediate level students and 100 teachers teaching English at the Federal Government Educational Institutions. Chi-square tests and z-test for proportions were used to analyze the data. The data were analyzed through SPSS, Excel, and MSAT software. Results from the students' responses show that English language teachers interact with students in Urdu very frequently in English language classes. It is also found that English language teachers use Urdu as a medium of instruction. Further, teachers' methodology is largely limited to Grammar Translation Method. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the English language teachers need to interact with students in English more frequently. It is also recommended that English language may be used as a medium of instruction at the HSSC level. Further, it is recommended that English language teachers may be given both pre- and in-service trainings about new trends in ELT methodology.

Keywords: Teaching learning, mother tongue, higher secondary level, second language learning

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Introduction

The use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction is an important issue and it has been debated enormously. There are supporters as well as opponents of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in teaching and learning of second/foreign language. The supporters claim that it facilitates the learning process while the opponents invalidate its facilitative role and claim that it is detrimental to the learning process and should be avoided in teaching a second or foreign language.

The opponents of using mother tongue (L1) in teaching and learning a second language hold that the mind grows accustomed to the rules, system and mechanism of L1 acquisition and "[t]his specialization makes L1 processing efficient, but can cause problems when there is an attempt to process an L2 in the same way, even though the two languages may have different characteristics" (Schmitt, 2008, p. 336). The researcher feels that it is possible that the schemata, which are automatically developed for L1 do not allow L2 processing. The mismatches between processing of L2 linguistics features and L1 automatic processing make L2 learning difficult (Cutler & Noris, 1988 & Koda 1997, 1998 as cited in Schmitt, 2008). The researcher feels that as the learners of L2 cannot make association, which is a good mnemonic aid, because of these mismatches, it becomes difficult for the learners to learn L2.

Literature Review

Current research has corroborated the opinion that mother tongue has a strong impact on the learning and teaching of L2. The mother tongue does interfere the process of learning L2 but research has found that there are intricacies within the language system, which is being learned, which can cause confusion:

> not all cross linguistic differences cause learning problems, and some things turn out to be more difficult than predicted by contrastive analysis. The notions of cross linguistic influence and learning difficulty later came to be more clearly distinguished, and learners' errors were seen as falling into two possible categories: 'interlingual' confusions, caused by interference or transfer from the mother tongue, and 'intralingual' confusions, caused by complexities in the second language itself (Swan, 1997, pp.4-5)

This indicates that learners have not only to struggle to overcome the intralingua difficulties but also they have to put extra efforts to lower the resistance of the mother tongue to learning L2. "Independently of the intrinsic ease or difficulty of items, however, a learner's mother tongue can greatly affect the way he or she is able to approach them" (Swan, 1997, p. 5). The literature shows that the situation aggravates even further when the whole part of speech of the target language is missing from the mother tongue, for example, the Finnish speakers use "case-endings to express the meanings which are communicated by prepositions in most European languages. Consequently Finnish learners of English have substantial trouble with prepositions as a class: they find them not only difficult to learn, but difficult to notice" (Swan, 1997, p. 6). The prepositions may look surplus to them but they make a necessary class of English.

Harmer (2001) points out the confusions caused by the mother tongue in learning English as a second language. These confusions occur at the level of sounds when the sounds of English language do not exist in the mother tongue, at the level of grammar when the two languages have different structures, and the false cognates also cause confusions. But even then there are various reasons for students' use of the mother tongue in learning English. The first reason is the inappropriate level of difficulty of the tasks for students. If the beginners are given a topic which is linguistically difficult for them to deal with, in such case they can talk about the topic in their mother tongue. Another reason is that it is natural for learners to think in the mother tongue when they learn a second language particularly at the intermediate level. Students also use mother tongue in the classroom when they perform 'pedagogical tasks' or when their teachers talk to them in their mother tongue. It shows that students get encouraged to use their mother tongue when a teacher himself uses it.

Cultural differences and language family relationship also affect the learning process of L2. "Where the first and second languages are closely related, there may be fewer errors resulting from the intrinsic difficulty of what has to be learnt, since the mother tongue will provide support in more areas" (Swan, 1997, p. 7). In case of similarities between the mother tongue and L2, perhaps the linguistic items of the L2 fit into the automatic process of L1 with less struggle. This connection between the mother tongue and L2 facilitates the learning process.

Munawar (2007) suggests two stages of teaching a second or a foreign language ie "Oral Expression" and "Oral Comprehension". At

the oral expression level students are made to "talk to each other in the target language in whatever vocabulary they have" (p. 33). She recommends role play activities and gives a golden rule for teaching oral expression successfully that is "I hear only in the target language. I speak only in the target language. For any other language I am deaf and dumb!" (p. 35). When it comes to oral comprehension, she suggests learning by doing or learning by acting approach of teaching helpful. The move should be from familiar to unfamiliar expressions. She leaves some room for the use of mother tongue especially when they are stuck. This strategy seems similar to the teaching practice in which teachers move from difficult to easy expressions.

The use of mother tongue has positive effects on students' learning of the second language or a foreign language. Code-switching is developmental (Atkinson, 1987). Harbord (1992) on the other hand suggests that student-teacher communication in the target language can provide a best source for students' learning of the target language (as cited in Schmitt, 2008). It implies that teachers' talking with students should be in English. This will not only encourage students to use English but also will help them improve their English.

Harmer (2001) suggests that the acceptability depends on the nature of activity of the students. If they are reading a text in pairs and use L1 to enhance their understanding, it will be quite acceptable to use L1. But if students are doing an 'oral fluency activity' the use of L1 will mar the purpose of the activity. According to him the use of English should be promoted in English language classrooms particularly in the oral production activities, and students should be encourage to use English more frequently. He further emphasizes the importance of TTT (teacher talking time) as an important source of language learning. Therefore, teachers should speak in English in the class for most of the time. Nonetheless, the use of L1 can facilitate the teaching and learning of English at the 'lower level'.

Bawcom (2002) in her action research found more progress in those students who used English language in class than the one who was more 'offender' of using L1 in the class. She suggests that L1 and L2 should be combined together in a harmonious way in which the importance of the use of both is taken care of.

The Use of L1 in Pakistani Context

In Pakistan, Urdu is largely used as the medium of instruction. Students, whose mother tongue is other than Urdu, have to learn Urdu first and then English. This makes their job two fold that is they have to learn two languages at the same time. Learning Urdu and English at the same time slows down the learning of English language. Students learn English through Urdu and then translate Urdu into their mother tongue. The researcher has also gone through the same experience in his school and college days. He did not have any opportunities of speaking in English, which affected his speaking so adversely that he could not utter a single sentence without thinking about it for a long time and without structuring and restructuring it before speaking it. Therefore, the researcher feels that using Urdu as a medium of instruction all the time may affect the learning of English adversely especially at the Higher Secondary level.

The school system have been classified into three different categories in Pakistan. The first category relates to English medium schools which use English as a medium of instructions. The second category focuses more on Urdu and the third category uses regional or provincial languages such as Pashto, Bahravei and Sindhi. In the second and third categories English is not given much weighting at SSC level. These three types "serve as feeding institutions to the intermediate level. At this level, learners from different backgrounds as mentioned above, face different problems, as they have to switch over from various mediums of instruction to English Medium" (Shah, Jumani, & Khan, 2009, p. 59).

In Pakistan, Grammar-Translation Method is mostly used in the government schools and colleges. It is the earliest method of 'Modern Foreign Language' teaching based on the method of teaching Latin and Greek in the Middle Ages. It focuses on "the teaching of formal grammatical rules and translating foreign language written texts into one's mother tongue" (Weihua, 2000, p. 250). Mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction and there is hardly given any attention to speaking or listening (Richards & Rodgers, 1995). However, it has been observed generally that Grammar–translation method does not meet the growing needs of second language learning. Therefore, the researcher feels that innovation needs to be brought in the teaching methodology

and dependence on the mother tongue only in teaching and learning of English should be reduced. This research aims at investigating the situation in government colleges and schools in terms of the use of the mother tongue.

Research Methodology

This research was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The researcher used questionnaires for teachers and students and classroom observation sheet for the collection of data. This study is a part of a larger project for which the research instruments were piloted and made valid and reliable. The teacher and student questionnaires consisted of open ended questions and closed ended items. The classroom observations were conducted by the researcher and other observers from the institutions. The sample of the study consisted of 100 English language teachers and 400 Intermediate students. Thirty classroom observations were also included. The sample was selected using random sampling technique from the Federal Government Educational Institutions in the capital territory of Islamabad. The questionnaires were retrieved from 79% teachers, 90.25% students and 96.6% observations were also conducted, which show that the response rate was quite high.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel, SPSS, and MSTAT software. The researcher used chi-square goodness of fit test, z- test for proportion for a single population and the significance value for these inferential tests was kept 0.05.

Students' Responses

The student questionnaires were retrieved from 361 participants out of 400 students. The questionnaires consisted of both closed ended items and open ended questions. The percentages of the data are shown in tabular form. The values of the inferential statistical measures are also given in the tables.

Table 1
Results of Students' Responses about Language of Interaction with Teachers

A	B	C	E
Scales	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Never	50	13.9	13.9
Seldom	234	64.8	78.7
Sometimes	14	3.9	82.5
Often	53	14.7	97.2
Very often	10	2.8	100
Total	361	100	

Chi-square= 118.695, P-value 0.000; Z= -13.29, P-value= 0.000

Results about the teachers' language of interaction are displayed in the Table 1. The mode of responses is 'Seldom'. The results are (i) 13.9% respondents opted for the option 'Never', (ii) 64.8% reported that their teachers 'Seldom' talked to them in English, (iii). 3.9% reported 'Sometimes', (iv) 14.7% said that their teachers 'Often' talked to them in English, (v) 10 students opted for the option 'Very often' having percentage 2.8 of the total responses.

Chi-square test was used to know the difference in the proportion of the positive and negative responses. Its value is 118.695 and its corresponding p-value 0.000 is significant which shows that the proportions are highly significantly different from each other. The z-test for proportions was used to compare proportion of the positive responses with 50 % of the total population. The z-value is -13.298. Its low p-value 0.000 shows that the result is significant. It means that the positive responses are significantly smaller. It shows that the English language teachers do not talk to students in English.

Table 2
Results of Students' Responses about Giving Students Exercises about Translation from Urdu into English and Vice Versa

A	B	C	D
Scales	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Never	63	17.5	17.5
Seldom	73	20.2	37.7
Sometimes	55	15.2	52.9
Often	96	26.6	79.5
Very often	74	20.5	100
Total	361	100	

Chi-square= 21.94, P-value0.000;   Z= 4.83, P-value=0.000

The Table 2 summarizes the responses about translation from English to Urdu and vice versa. The mode of the responses is 'Often'. The results about translation from English to Urdu and vice versa are (i) 17.5% respondents reported that they never did activities about translation from English to Urdu and vice versa, (ii) 73 students selected the option 'Seldom' having percentage of 20.2, (iii) 26.6% respondents reported that they often did activities about translation, (iv) 74 students opted for the option 'Very often' having the percentage of20.5.

Chi-square test was used to identify the differences in the proportions of the responses of the different categories. The chi-square value 21.94 with its p-value 0.000 shows that the differences of the proportions are highly significant. To compare the positive responses with the half of the total population z-test for proportions was used. The z-test value 4.83 and its corresponding p-value 0.000 show that the positive responses are significantly large in number. It suggests that Urdu is used in the classrooms as a significant number of teachers give exercises about translations from Urdu into English and vice versa.

Table 3
Results of Students' Responses about teachers' Instruction in Urdu

A	B	C	D	E
Scales	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulati Percen
Never	79	21.9	21.9	21.9
Seldom	61	16.9	16.9	38.9
Sometimes	88	24.4	24.4	63.3
Often	68	18.8	18.9	82.2
Very often	64	17.7	17.8	100
Total	360	99.7	100	
Missing Responses	1	0.3		

Chi-square= 17.78, p-value=000;   Z= 4.32, p-value=0.000

The Table 3 summarizes the information about the medium of instruction collected from the respondents. The mode of the responses is 'Sometimes'. The results about the medium of instruction are (i) 21.9 percent of students replied that their teachers never delivered instructions in Urdu, (ii) 16.9 percent of the participants opined that their teachers seldom delivered instructions in Urdu, (iii) 24.4 % of the participants said that they sometimes had their instructions in Urdu, (iv) 18.9% of the students said that their teachers of ten delivered instruction in Urdu, (v) 17.8 % of students reported that their teachers delivered instructions in Urdu very often.

Chi-square test was used to identify the differences in the positive and negative responses. Its p-value 0.000 is significantly smaller than the level of significance. It shows that the results are significant suggesting that they are considerably different. To know whether the proportion of the positive responses is equal to half of the total population z-test for proportions was used. Its value 4.32 with its corresponding p-value 0.000 means that the positive responses are significantly more in number than the half of the total responses, which shows that teachers deliver their instruction in Urdu.

Results of the Open Ended Questions from the Student Questionnaire

A small percent i.e. 1.6% students reported that their teachers corrected their mistakes and that they liked their teachers' combination of English and Urdu as a medium of instruction.

Also, 2.5% of the respondents suggested that a mixture of both Urdu and English should be used as a medium of instruction

Teachers' Responses

Table 4
Teachers' Responses about Giving Students Exercises about Translation from Urdu into English and Vice Versa

A	B	C	D	E
Scales			Valid	Cumulative
	Frequency	Percent	percent	percent
Never	2	2.5	2.6	2.6
Seldom	8	10.1	10.3	12.8
Sometimes	9	11.4	11.5	24.4
Often	38	48.1	48.7	73.1
Very often	21	26.6	26.9	100
Total	78	98.7	100	
Missing Responses	1	1.3		
Total	79	100		

Chi-square= 43.13,p-value= 0.000;   z= 9.82, p-value=0.000

The Table 4 shows there sponses of the participants of the research about giving students exercises about translation from Urdu into English and vice versa. The results are: (i) 2.6 % of the participants reported that they never gave students exercises about translation from Urdu into English and vice versa, (ii) 8 respondents said that they seldom gave students exercises about translation and their valid percentage is 10.3, (iii) 11.5 % of the teachers reported that they sometimes gave students exercises about translation, (iv) 48.7 % of the teachers said that they often gave students such activities, (v) 26.9 % of the teachers told that they gave students exercises about translation very often, (vi) out of 79 respondents only 1 did not reply.

To identify the differences in the proportions of the different responses chi-square test was used. Its value 43.13 and its p-value 0.000<0.05 show that the differences in the proportions of the different responses are significant. In order to find out whether the proportion of the positive responses is equal to the half of the total population z-test for proportions was used. Its z-value 9.82 and its p-value 0.000 mean that the positive responses are significantly large. It shows that English language teachers give activities concerning translation from Urdu into English and viceversa.

Table 5
Teachers' Responses about Speaking Urdu with Students

A	B	C	D	E
Scales	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Never	14	17.7	17.9	17.9
Seldom	21	26.6	26.9	44.9
Sometimes	33	41.8	42.3	87.2
Often	5	6.3	6.4	93.6
Very often	5	6.3	6.4	100
Total	78	98.7	100	
Missing responses	1	1.3		
Total	79	100		

Chi-square= 0.82, p-value= 0.365

The Table 5 shows the responses of the participants of the research about the language of interaction with students. The results from the table are: (i) 17.9 % of the participants told that they never interacted with students in Urdu, (ii) 26.9 % of the respondents said that they seldom interacted with students in Urdu, (iii) 42.3 % of the teachers reported that they sometimes interacted with students in Urdu, (iv) 6.4 % of the teachers said that they often interacted with students in Urdu, (v) 6.4 % teachers told that they interacted with students in Urdu very often , (vi) out of 79 respondents only 1 did not reply.

To identify the differences in the proportions of the different responses chi-square test was used. Its value 0.82 and its p-value 0.365>0.05 show that the differences in the proportions of the different

responses are insignificant. It shows that the researcher's interact with students in English.

Results of the Open Ended Questions from the Teacher Questionnaire

The responses from the open ended questions show that 60% of the teachers use GTM whereas a small percent of the teachers said that they used other methods.

As suggested by 51% of the teachers, GTM is the most effective teaching method for students in achieving their goals of learning English language. A small number of teachers reported Communicative Approach, Direct Method and the Eclectic Approach.

Classroom Observations

Table 6
Results of Observation Sheets about Teachers' Language of Interaction

A	B	C	D
Scales	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Never	1	3.4	3.4
Little	8	27.6	31
Somewhat	6	20.7	51.7
Much	11	37.9	89.7
A great deal	3	10.3	100
Total	29	100	

Chi-square=4.17,p-value=0.041;   z= 2.21, p-value=0.014

The Table 6 displays the data about teachers' language of interaction with students collected through observations. The results of the observers are (i) the teachers who 'Never' interacted with students in English are 3.4%; (ii) teachers who interacted with students in English 'Little' are 27.6%; (iii) teachers who interacted with students in English 'Somewhat' are 20.7%; (iv) teachers who interacted with students in English 'Much' are 37.9%; (v) teachers who interacted in English 'A great deal' are 10.3%.

To identify the differences in the different categories, chi-square test goodness of fit test was used. Its p-value=0.041 is smaller than the level of significance, which means that the differences are significant. The *z*-test was used to check whether the proportion of the positive data isatleast50%ofthetotalpopulation.Itsz-valueis2.21.Itsp-value 0.014 shows that the result is significant. It shows that the research hypothesis, which states that the current teaching activities of English language teachers do not align with the given objectives set by the Federal Government of Pakistan at the Higher Secondary level, is not supported, as the proportion of positive responses is significantly large.

Results

There is a mixed reaction about the medium of instruction amongst students and teachers. The results of the responses are:

i. The students' responses show that the English language teachers do not talk to them in English in the English language classes. The results from the students' responses are highly significant as 78.7% (13.9% never and 64.8% seldom) show that the teachers interact with students in Urdu. However, the teachers responses do not support this claim as 44.8% of (17.9% never and 26.9% seldom) have refused the statement that they interact with students in Urdu which means that they interact with students in English. Also, the classroom observations show that 68.9% (20.7% Somewhat, 37.9% Much, 10.3% A great deal) of the teachers interact with their students in English.

ii. The frequency of exercises about translation from Urdu into English and vice versa is quite high as 62.3% (15.2% Sometimes, 26.6% Often, 20.5% Very often) of the students which is a significantly high percentage support this statement. This is also supported by the English language teachers as 87.1% (11.5% Sometimes, 48.7% Often, 26.9% Very often) of the responses are positive.

iii. The teachers use Urdu as a medium of instruction. This has been supported by students' responses as 61.1% (24.4% Sometimes, 18.9% Often, 17.8% Very often) of the students report in favor of this statement. This is supported by the teachers' responses as 60% of the teachers employ Grammar Translation Method in which most of the interaction takes place in the students' language which is Urdu in our case.

iv. The responses show that the focus is mostly on the GTM in English

language teaching as 60% of teachers use this method and 50% of the teachers find it most effective in teaching English.

Discussion

Mother tongue could be used to some extent but its more frequent use could be detrimental to students' proficiency in the target language. The use of the mother tongue can both facilitate and or hinder the teaching and learning of a second language because of the true and or false cognates in the mother tongue as pointed out by Swan (1997). But researcher felt that the teachers should initially utilize the positive role of Urdu for a brief period of a week or two but should withdraw from its use as students at HSSC level (grades 11 and 12) have already studied English for almost ten years and the teachers can build on this prior knowledge. There are a number of factors such as 'difficulty in determining the mother tongue', and social and ethnic divisiveness of mother tongue education' that may not favor the use of mother tongue (L1) (Gupta, 2010, p. 496) in language teaching. Therefore, dependency on the L1 should be reduced over the time as students make progress in English learning as L1 may not be good for developing students' fluency in English language.

It was found that a significantly large number of teachers use GTM in teaching English at the HSSC level in Islamabad. One reason of the significant use of GTM is the requirement of the examination, in which students are required to translate from English into Urdu and vice versa, and another reason may be teachers' lack of awareness of the other modern approaches and methods of teaching second or foreign languages. The researcher feels that using GTM alone is not sufficient to meet the objectives because it basically lays emphasis on "the reading and writing aspects of the foreign language being taught without paying much attention to the SPEAKING and LISTENING" (Weihua, 2000,p. 250) and more importantly its main objectives are to help "students read and appreciate foreign language literature" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 11), which are in dissonance with the objectives set by the Curriculum of the Federal Government of Pakistan for students at the Higher Secondary level.

The effectiveness of GTM may be due to the fact that Teachers' and students' feel more conversant with this method. Another reason for the effectiveness of GTM may be based on students' compulsion to translate from L1 into L2 and vice versa in the final examination. There is a

compulsory question in the final examination in which students have to translate from L1 into L2 and vice versa, as far as the researcher knows. This effectiveness may be with regard to the final examinations in which students are required to show the competence of some grammar rules and have to translate from Urdu into English and vice versa. But the researcher feels that GTM may not be that much effective to meet the objectives and to help students improve their oracy skills as the competence in oracy skills is not addressed in the GTM which are part of the objectives to be achieved by the students. Besides, "the habit of translating is now felt to impede the proper learning of a foreign language" (Harris, 1969, p.5). However, Harris's view needs to be further probed into. Therefore, teachers are required to get a sound training in the field of ELT which may make them familiar with other approaches and methods. This may improve the pedagogical practices of ELT teachers.

Conclusions

The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is an important issue. The objective of the study was to investigate the use of mother tongue at HSSC level at educational institution in Islamabad. The related reviewed literature and the data analysis show that there should be a balanced approach to using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction particularly in teaching and learning of a second language. The reviewed literature shows that L1 might be used in the beginning levels when the language learners are stuck and cannot express themselves in the target language. However, its use should be reduced when students make progress and advance in the target language. Likewise, the result show that majority of the English language teachers use Grammar Translation Method for teaching English in which the use of mother tongue is unavoidable. Teachers give students activities related to translation from Urdu into English and vice versa. These activities are a part of GTM, and secondly translation skills are tested in the annual exams. Teachers have reported that the use of GTM is more effective in the teaching and learning of English at the Higher and Secondary level. However, researcher felt that this efficacy may be in terms of getting marks and passing examinations. It may not be as much effective with regard to teaching English language proficiency as the purpose of the GTM is to appreciate the target language literature in the mother tongue. It does not focus equally on the four major language skills. Therefore, it may not be as much helpful to improve students' oral proficiency skills.

Therefore, its use should be discouraged when the purpose is to improve spoken language of students.

Recommendations

- The English language teachers interact with students in English but it is recommended that they interact with their students in English more often inside and outside the classroom
- It is recommended that the frequent use of the mother tongue at HSSC level be avoided in the classrooms unless it is direly needed.
- It is recommended that English may be used as the medium of instruction in teaching English at the HSSC level. However, the teachers may switch over to Urdu when it is unavoidable.
- Most of the teachers use GTM which suggests that there is lack of awareness of the other modern approaches and methods of teaching second or foreign languages. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers may be given pre- and in-service trainings to keep them abreast with the new trends in ELT methodologies.

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