



RESEARCH PAPER

The Use of L1 in English Language Classrooms: A Case of Dera Ghazi Khan Punjab

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: April 18, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: August 05, 2021</p> <p>Online: August 10, 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Code Switching, Code-Mixing. English Language Teaching, L1</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: drarslanraheem @ue.edu.pk</p>	<p>The use of first language has always been an element of concern for the educationists, particularly, in case of English language classrooms. L1 is used in a number of ways in schools specifically in English language classrooms. There are classes where the practices of teaching and learning are solely carried out in L1- in this case Siraiki and Urdu. In this study the aim was to explore the use of L1 in English language classrooms at the given locale. The objectives were to identify the practices and the reasons behind such use of L1 in English language classrooms. The data was collected through classroom observations and follow-up interviews with the teachers. Both the methods involved two separate tools for the collection of data. For classroom observation, an observation sheet was used and for interviews the researcher used a recorder to help in transcription and analysis of the data. Finally, the results reflected that the L1 usage existed in various forms like code-switching, mixing, and in most of the cases, its sole use. The various reasons behind that have been discussed in the results section.</p>

Introduction

Language learning in context of Pakistan have always been challenging due to a number of factors. Lack of knowledge with regard to teaching methods, teaching techniques and its various approaches is one of the factors that have been affecting effectiveness of English language teaching in our context. Language teachers have been relying on a number of traditional methodologies in order to teach English language to the learners. In context of Dera Ghazi Khan, the majority is conceived to be relying on such traditional methodologies to teach English to the learners. In addition, it has also been observed- shall be investigated in this study- that there is use of L1 in English language classrooms. The use is not just limited to teacher and learner interaction. The learners are

observed to communicative in L1 in their classes even when they discuss the concepts related to English language.

A number of studies have shown that such use of L1 in language classes is of great importance and, undoubtedly, it has benefits. In this connection, Swain and Lapkin (2000) found, in his study related to the French students, that had they not been allowed to use L1 in doing the classroom tasks their learning would have not been that much effective. Moreover, Villamil and Guerrero (1996) asserted on the basis of their study, which focused Spanish speaking university students, that the use of L1 enhanced the ability of the students. It was because of L1 that they were able to comprehend, deduce and retrieve the linguistic input from their memory. That enabled them to maintain a meaningful interchange of dialogues with their peers during the assigned task. Additionally, there has been a study by Hsieh (2000) who argues that the use of L1 in her case has been very productive in terms of performance of her students. The researcher found that even translation, one of the ways to use L1, helped to enhance English reading ability of her students. The students, through that, were able to read in order to comprehend and understand the implications given in the provided text. According to her, this also helped her students in expanding their English vocabulary.

Lin, 2013; De la Campa and Nassaji, 2009; Macaro, 2001, argue that the use of L1 helps the learners to understand the world in a better way. It can be considered one of the vital tools that help the learners in better understanding of the concepts which they are taught in classrooms. The ultimate goal of a language classroom is to facilitate the students to maintain a meaningful discourse through communication. And, the use of L1 in such context plays a vital academic cum social role. Moreover, the researchers like Cummins (2007) are of the view that L1 enables the learners to start the processing of the target language. According to him, L1 competence helps the learners to compare and contrast the underlying principles of the target language with that of their L1. Through this the learners become able to process the linguistic input and comprehend it in order to get the coded information and knowledge in broader terms. In case the learner is unable to use the target language, Cognitive and Conversational skills are mainly utilized with the help of their L1 at the initial stages.

Macaro (2001) argues the inseparability of L1 in form of code-switching with respect to second language learning at the initial stages. According to him, the teachers have been found playing their authoritative role in their language classes by switching the codes- target language to L1. They do this in order to keep a check and to control the content and discourse in their classes. This enables the teachers to facilitate the learners by clarifying the concepts and simplifying the meaning so that the learner is able to understand it easily. Macaro emphasized that such use must be allowed in Language in the context of target language learning because this facilitates learning in a simplified way. Edstrom (2006) seconds this by adding that the choice vis-à-vis the medium of instructions must be solely decided by a teacher or the learners. Finally, Ford (2009) supports this with an empirical study that the use of L1 helps to reduce stress and anxiety among the learners. Therefore, it is vital to use L1 in the classes where language learning takes place.

But, it must be kept in mind that a coin has two sides. The first one, the benefits of L1 usage, has been discussed. Now, the other side is going to be under discussion. Though L1 usage is of great importance and bears fruits according to some researchers, there are a number of researchers who have found results totally opposite to the studies which were discussed earlier. According to one of the researches, conducted by Lu et al (2004), the institutions in various Asian countries, including Korea and Taiwan, suggests to make the use of L1 limited as much as possible in terms of English language classes. Miles (2004); McDonald (1993) have views in opposition to the use of L1 in teaching English language. Their argument is based on the concept that owing to the redundant use of L1 the learners stop thinking in the target language and their cognitive abilities do not develop with respect to the use of English language. In case the students see their mentor using the first language, the learners switch to their L1 and start using it rather than the use of the target language in the given context. The argument has been further supported by Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015) who add that the use of L1 is discouraged and banned by the advocates who are in favor of using English as a medium of instructions in classrooms. Despite all such claims, Macaro (2001) emphasizes that the use of L1 must not be discouraged because L1 usage is quite helpful for the learners when it comes to their initial stages of target language learning.

Literature Review

The heated debated in case of whether to go for L1 or not to use it at all were initiated due to the contribution of Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009). Before that, there was Miles (2004) who was both against and in favor of L1 usage in English language classrooms. Simultaneously, there was a research by Reyes (2004) that supported the use of L1 in the context of language learning. The researcher studied two different age groups of learners and found that code-switching was more frequent as compared to the young. The learners were doing so in order to accomplish their sociolinguistic goals. Finally, it was concluded that such use of L1 helps in bridging communication gap among the peers in a class.

The term code-switching till this stage has been widely used. It seems to be very important to discuss how the term itself has been defined. The term is defined in a way that it refers to a practice that involves learners who choose alternate codes or linguistic elements. By doing so the language user tries to contextualize the talk in an interaction with his or her fellow. At first it was considered to be one of the indicators of incompetence of a language user vis-à-vis the language in use Nzwange (2000). In similar terms, Bailey (2007) added that code-switching is marked as a linguistic as well as a cognitive deficiency of a language user. In addition, it is also considered, by Nativist groups as a sign of rejection. But, Academicians view it as a strategy through which political and social meanings and structures are negotiated. That is to say, it helps in creating a comfort zone for the learners so that effective and productive learning takes place. Moreover, in Vygotskian terms, the learners through such use of L1 try to find a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for them. ZPD, in this case, refers to the developmental zone of a learner that needs linguistic input so that he or she is able to meet the required proficiency level in case it is a context of language learning.

Similarly, Cook (2001) views that the exposure of the target language is not that much necessary and one can easily acquire the target language the way he or she acquired

the first one (L1). There is another claim by Brown (2007). He was of the view that in case of language learning the only thing that matters is the exposure of the target language provided to a learner: the way it is provided to a child. Both the arguments support Krashen (1981). Krashen's hypothesis states that a learner must be given comprehensible input in lines with the natural order of acquisition. This, according to him, adds to the L2 learning and makes it effective because it follows the natural way of language acquisition. Exposure to L2 or the target language, in these studies, has been very much emphasized. This is also supported by the studies of Gass (1997) and Lightbown (1991).

The researchers in favor of target language (English in this case) only camp maintain that the use of both L1 and L2 must be kept separate. That is to say, there is no need to use L1 in the contexts where one uses L2. This helps the learners in improving their competence in the language they are learning at the given time. This claim, according to Spada (2007), is based on the idea that L1 and L2 have a separate place in language faculty; therefore, the redundant use of L1 in L2 classrooms may lead to fossilization of learners' L2. But, studies show that a learner has language faculty where L1 and L2 exist together in an intertwined way that makes it difficult to separate them in terms of their functions. In similar terms, Cook (1997) adds that languages are intertwined in a sense that a learner does not keep that data in one's mind separately; therefore, languages cannot be separated in mind in terms of Phonology, vocabulary, syntax etc. Cummins (1991) has used a phrase 'Common Underlying proficiencies' to refer to this concept. Krashen (1982) had already proposed the idea that there needs to be exclusive use of L2 in classrooms as it was the only place where the learners could practice it.

But, the importance of L1 may not be completely bracketed out when it comes to L2 learning. Ortega (2007) puts that L1 helps the learners to convert L2 input in to an intake. That is to say, the vast exposure of L2 only does not guarantee that the learners would take the input as an intake. That is why Turnbull (2001) argued that removing L1 from L2 classrooms might lead to problems rather than effective learning of L2. This situation is visible clearly, especially, in lower level learners. Cook (2001) was of the view that the L1 of a learner must be considered as a resource rather than a problem in L2 learning. Therefore, in case the learners switch codes, it must not be discouraged as most of the times interactions in a multilingual context take place in the form of code-switching.

Material and Methods

As per the demand of the study the researchers applied qualitative methodology. Specifically, it is a case of schools at Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan. The study involved both non-participatory observation and semi-structured interview which helped in the collection of the data. The researcher started the collection of data by getting consent the participants at the given locale of the study. The classes were observed with the help of a check list and finally the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews from the teachers to help them explore the effectiveness of the use of L1 in English language classrooms at Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab. The results of the study were presented in descriptive form in various themes. That is to say, the instances related to the themes and by supporting them through the results that were got with the help of the observation sheet.

Results and Discussion

As far as the findings of the study are concerned there were a number of practices related to the use of L1 in English language classes in the various schools of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab. L1 practices existed in the form of code-switching, code-mixing and in various classes there existed even the total use of L1 in English language classrooms.

The participants, teachers from whom interviews were conducted, were of the view that the students use L1 in their English language classes because of a various reasons. One of them is the lack of exposure. They said that students are not provided the input of English language. That makes it difficult for them to use English in their classes, with their peers or even their teachers.

In addition, the participants were of the view that students seem to be comfortable when their L1 (Siraiki in this case) is used in the classes. That is why the students use L1 in their classrooms. This helps them to interact and develop healthy relationship with their fellows. The participants added that they used L1 in their classrooms, sometimes, to facilitate students in understanding the vocabulary items through one word equivalent in their L1. In order to help them to retain that vocabulary item and understand it fully, they were code-mixing, involving both syntactic as well as lexical code mixing.

The participants viewed such use of L1 to be very positive because of the context where learning and teaching was taking place. They were of the view that the students mainly interact in their L1 and even if a teacher tries to speak in English the students request to switch to L1. According to students they were not able to understand when their teachers started speaking English in their classrooms. Upon asking, the participants said that it was because of the lack of exposure to the TL that the students were facing difficulty in comprehending the input. Therefore, L1 usage, in this context, becomes a vital element of English language classes. Moreover, the participants were of the view that such use must be gradually decreased with the increase in the input of English Language. That is how the students would become able to develop their linguistic proficiency in English Language.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study helped to explore the use of L1 in English language classes in Dera Ghazi Khan particularly in its schools. The participants found that L1 was being widely used in English Language classes at Dera Ghazi Khan. The use existed in the form of code mixing, code switching and total use- in majority of the cases. The participants added that it was due to a number of reasons that the students were using L1 in English language classrooms. Some of them were: lack of exposure to L1, translation, one word equivalent, daily life conversation etc. But, the teachers added that such use must be gradually decreased with the increase in the input of English language. Finally, the use of L1- having certain negative connotations- is not that much negative. It must be used but it must be having limitations. Otherwise, this would be negatively affecting the objectives of English Language classes.

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