

Language Shift At Intermediate Level And Its Impact On Students' Interest For Learning: A Case Study Of Karachi

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Abstract: Mother tongue is deemed the most appropriate as Language of Instruction (LOI) by researchers in the domain of applied linguistic and psycholinguistics. In most of the postcolonial countries, it could not be made possible due to multiple reasons. The most significant may be the hegemonic status of English as compared to indigenous languages because of colonizers' supremacy. The situation of Pakistan is no more different. The dominance of English is easily noticeable and prevalently realized in educational institutes of Pakistan. In one particular situation, LOI is changed from Urdu to English at intermediate level in public sector colleges of Pakistan. Present study has explored this case in Karachi the biggest and thickly populated city to highlight the effect of this particular language shift on the interest of the student for education. In this regard a questionnaire was developed and data was collected from 264 students through random sampling and subsequently analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study finally reached to the decision that language shift at intermediate level has significant negative effect on the interest of the students for learning which entails serious concern for educationists and policy makers.

Keywords: language, shift, intermediate, level, case, study.

Introduction

Selection of language for academic purposes have been quite problematic and controversial in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual countries like Pakistan. The decision regarding LOI or Medium of Instruction (MOI) (Li & Shum, 2008) have also been reported as a critical issue. It may be easily noticed that instead of taking care of students' interests; foreign, economic, national, ethnic etc. interest have been taken into account. According to Nisar & Ijaz (2011) in certain cases it may be agenda based. It has also been observed through literature review that educationists also

reflect difference of opinion in this regard. People have different attitude even toward indigenous languages. In case of foreign language as an option of LOI differences may increase multiple times. Therefore, there cannot be formulaic decision or policy in this regard but it may reiterated that the decision or policy should be in the favor of the students. Their academic goals and future career may be taken into account at large. It is important, otherwise, students will bear the consequences accordingly.

Present study has targeted the similar issue. In Pakistan, LOI is switched from Urdu to English at intermediate level especially in public sector higher secondary schools and colleges. Is usually happens in the case of science, commerce or business subjects. The study focused only on the students of science subjects. As human beings we have necessary attachment to our indigenous languages and we are comparatively more comfortable with them. Psychologically this situation recommends mother tongue or indigenous languages as a better option for LOI. However, switching at any level creates disturbance for the students. Present study is meant to highlight this disturbance at intermediate level for science students of the public sector colleges of Karachi.

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis has been targeted in the present study in particular:

H₀: Male and female students will not have difference of opinion regarding effect of language shift at intermediate level on their interest for learning.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

- (1) What is the importance of language shift at intermediate level in terms of language of instruction?
- (2) What is the effect of language shift at intermediate level on students' interest for learning?

Literature Review

Language of educational instruction has always been an issue in multilingual countries. The land of Pakistan also falls in the category of those countries where more than one languages are being spoken. According to the report of UNESCO (2007) Pakistani education system is quite rich in term of MOIs. There are almost four languages, Pashto, Sindhi, Urdu and English which are being used as MOIs at different levels and in various regions. A newly born child in Pakistan usually faces the challenge of three/four languages from childhood to adulthood. The very first one is the mother tongue, the second one is national language Urdu, the third and fourth ones are

foreign languages English and Arabic. English is usually learnt in education institutes that is schools, colleges and universities, whereas, Arabic in Mosques or Madrassas for religious objectives like worship supplications and recitation of the Holy Quran or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). According to Rehman (2007) English got its roots in the Subcontinent in the nineteenth century with the British rule and now it has become a powerful LOI in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

It is pertinent to highlight here that before the unfortunate partition of Pakistan any decision regarding language policies and LOI in particular was taken after due considerations and deliberations to accommodate the residents of both East and West Pakistan. There was no controversy in this regard between Urdu and Bengali Speaking communities. In accordance with the point of view of Hassan (2007) harmony of the state was on the top in that particular time period and any room for the controversy was denied at the policy level. However, after the sad incident of partition, this issue of LOI could not be handled carefully and addressed incessantly in true letter and spirit.

Urdu is used as a LOI in almost all public sector schools of Punjab up to matric level. The situation is not similar in Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtonkawah, here, along with national language Urdu indigenous languages are also used as LOI at different level in various educational domains. In the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtonkawah Pashto is used as LOI up to primary level whereas in Sindh, Sindhi language is also used as LOI from nursery to higher education or university level.

There are different categories of schools and colleges in Pakistan which are based on MOI. There are English-medium, Urdu-medium, Sindhi-medium and Pashto-medium schools and colleges in particular. In almost all Urdu-medium schools, all subjects related to natural or social sciences are taught in Urdu. After matriculation when students opt for FSc pre-medical or pre-engineering, then LOI is changed from Urdu to English. Here occurs the language shift, change of MOI or change of LOI in almost all public sector higher secondary schools, intermediate or degree colleges of Pakistan. It stands pertinent to highlight here that the main author of the study has himself experienced this switching from Urdu to English during his academic career. This switching was taken as a threat by the students of rural areas. A considerable number of low achievers were unwilling to opt science subject at intermediate level only because of this language shift and other mediocre students were either dropout cases or low achievers. In this study the researchers are not interested to explore the benefits and losses of the choice of foreign language as a LOI. The main focus of the study is language shift or change of MOI. This change has definite effect on the learning performance of the students. The researchers are interested to explore this effect only.

English language has achieved a wonderful status in the domain of education and international communication. This fact is recognized not only in Pakistan but all over the world. According to Bjorkman (2008) it has become international lingua franca. Non-native speakers all over the world and developing countries in particular feel pride in it and it is appreciated among the people of elite class in these countries (Phillipson, 1992). According to Velasquez (2005) Tejero claimed in 1990 that the Filipinos used to feel superiority while realizing that they were among the three largest English speaking communities of the world. It may be claimed without any doubt that elite class in Pakistan use English in their social circle as a marker of their identity and also support its use in official domains of power but quite interestingly it is favored by middle and lower middle class as well (Rehman, 1997). This may be the possible reason that English is dominating almost all education circles at all levels as a LOI in Pakistan.

In the current circumstances students from poor and working class get their education in public sector schools and colleges. They do not enjoy English speaking environment in their social circles and usually not exposed to English even in their schools and colleges. When these students are promoted to intermediate level classes especially the students of science subjects (FSc pre-medical or pre-engineering, ICS etc.) they realize the shift of LOI from Urdu to English and this language shift may cause significant effect on their learning performance. According to Richard (1995) this problem may be denoted as alteration of terminology and subsequent disparity with the conceptual framework of the language which is foreign not indigenous. In case of present study it is English the language of colonizer and foreign language.

In post-colonial countries in general and in Pakistan in particular various arguments are produced in favor of English as a LOI. It is usually claimed that English as an MOI provides easy access to the modern and advanced knowledge of science and information technology. But this argument fails when we analyze the situation and find out that English is not the only source to access the latest knowledge and there are multiple examples like Korean, Chinese, Japanese, French, Russian etc. who made significant progress only in their indigenous languages. In case of Pakistan there may be another argument that Pakistani indigenous languages are comparatively less developed and lack the suitable lexicon to meet the requirement of advanced commercial, scientific and technological knowledge. But studies in the field of Linguistics prove that the requirement may be fulfilled through thorough language planning. According to Hussain (1992) Urdu language has gained the status of national lingua franca like English at international level. Therefore, Urdu may be a better option for LOI in Pakistan as indigenous language is after all a far better option than a foreign language (Tsui, et al, 1999). Researchers in the field of psycholinguistics claim that children learn best in their mother tongue (Mustafa, 2005).

The case of Pakistan in terms of MOI is quite serious. According to Rehman (2010) there are 6

major and 5 minor languages which are being spoken in Pakistan. Therefore, the possibility of a Bilingual or Trilingual/Multilingual Education System (Gorter, 2005) may not be workable. After thorough deliberations and collaborations a system of education may be devised in which English may be adopted for targeted objectives. However, these are serious concerns which may be addressed through thorough planning at policy level in education sector. Present study is only concerned with the language shift at intermediate level and its effect on students' interest for learning because concentration is highly important in the process of education. Loss of concentration definitely have some effect on students' learning performance subsequently.

Methodology

The research in hand is primarily a survey research. It falls under the category of a quantitative research, however, mixed method has been used for data analysis. It means that data has been analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For quantitative analysis version-16 of SPSS has been used and then quantitative data has also been interpreted qualitatively. As the research was meant to be a case study of Karachi city, therefore, consensus could not be developed because of huge population. There are 172 public colleges in Karachi out of which 72 are male and 60 are female colleges. The data was collected from a cluster of 36 male and 30 female colleges. Total sample size consists of 264 students of FSc medical and non-medical second year. It includes 144 male and 120 female students. For collection of data a quantitative tool (questionnaire) was developed. It consists of 10 items each followed by Likert Scale of five attributes. The reliability of the research instrument was through Cronbach's Alpha.

Data Analysis

The data has been analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively however, to control the volume of the research paper SPSS generated quantitative results are not mentioned here. The analysis was carried out in two parts. First the major hypothesis was tested. It is a null hypothesis which states that male and female students will not have difference of opinion regarding effect of language shift at intermediate level on their interest for learning. A 'T' test was applied in the process of analysis. However, the H_0 was rejected and it is established that male and female students have significant difference of opinion regarding effect of language shift at intermediate level on their interest for learning.

After testing the major hypothesis the items of the questionnaire were tested one by one. For the analysis of the items Chi-Square One-Variable test along with level of significance Alpha (α) = 0.05, degree of freedom (df) = $k - 1 = 5 - 1 = 4$, and decision rule: reject H_0 if computed value of $X^2 \geq 9.49$, was applied accordingly.

In accordance with the statement of item number one, 'I use mother tongue for classroom discourse'

the statement of the problem was generated as ‘there is no significant difference in the opinion of students regarding use of mother tongue for classroom discourse. The quantitative analysis concludes that the hypothesis is rejected. However, out of total number of two hundred and sixty four respondents, thirty eight agree with the statement and two hundred fourteen strongly agree. The results confirm that there is overwhelming majority (95%) of the students who use mother tongue in classroom discourse. It may be because of the fact that the residents of the Karachi city usually talk in Urdu as the mother tongue of the majority population is also Urdu.

The second item of the questionnaire comprises the statement ‘I don’t like reading English books or magazines’. It is converted to problem statement as ‘there is no significant difference in the opinion of students regarding their liking for reading English books and magazines’. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test however, conclude that the null hypothesis is strongly rejected. One hundred and forty seven strongly agree with the statement and ninety nine agree, which confirm that ninety three percent students do not like reading English books or magazines.

The item number three of the questionnaire states that ‘I watch indigenous language channels quite interestingly’. The same is converted into a problem statement there is no significant difference in the opinion of students regarding watching of indigenous language channels quite interestingly. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test, however, conclude that the problem statement in the form of null hypothesis is rejected. It is further interpreted that seventy nine students agree whereas one hundred and sixty four students strongly agree with the statement. It is finally concluded that ninety two percent of the respondents watch indigenous language channels quite interestingly.

The item number four of the questionnaire states that ‘watching English television channels is usually discouraged at my home’. The same is converted into a problem statement like ‘there is no significant difference in the opinion of students regarding item number four’. The subsequent interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test, however, reflects that the null hypothesis in the form of problem statement is rejected. There are one hundred and five respondents who strongly agree with the statement whereas seventy nine percent only agree. It is finally concluded that almost seventy percent of the students report that watching English TV channels are discouraged by their parents. It may be due to cultural differences which exist between Pakistani and European or American culture.

At number five among the items questionnaire occupies the statement ‘I use Urdu in the nonacademic activities at my college’. The same is converted into a problem statement ‘There is no significant difference in the opinion of students regarding use of Urdu in the nonacademic activities at college. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test however, concludes that

this null hypothesis is also rejected. There are eighty four percent students who agree with statement, and one hundred and fifty seven strongly agree. It is therefore, highlighted that ninety one percent of the respondents report that they use Urdu in the nonacademic activities at college. It may reflect that students are more comfortable with Urdu as a language of chitchat and entertainment.

The item number six of the questionnaire states that ‘I consider Urdu as a better LOI than English at intermediate level in particular’. The same is converted into a problem statement that is there is no significant difference in the opinion of students in regarding consideration of Urdu as a better LOI than English at LOI. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test concludes that null hypothesis mentioned in the form of problem statement is however, rejected. Out of two hundred and sixty four students, one hundred and twenty six students strongly agree, and seventy two agree with the statement. It is therefore, finally highlighted that seventy five percent respondents consider Urdu as a comparatively better LOI especially at intermediate level. It reflects the interest of the students in their national language.

The item number seven of the questionnaire states that ‘teachers do not encourage classroom discussion in English at intermediate level’. The same is converted into a problem statement for quantitative analysis that is there is no significant difference in the opinion of students regarding encouragement of the teachers for use of English in classroom discussion. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test concludes that the null hypothesis in the form of problem statement mentioned above is however, rejected. There are one hundred and twenty six students who strongly agree and eighty five agree with the statement. It is finally emphasized that eighty percent students confirm that teachers do not encourage classroom discussion in English which also, reflects teachers’ lack of interest in English language.

The item number eight of the questionnaire comprises the statement ‘I lose interest in the classroom activities when it is carried out in English’. The same is converted into a problem statement that is there is no significant difference of opinion among the students regarding students’ lack of interest in classroom activities when they are carried out in English language. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test concludes that null hypothesis mentioned above in the form of problem statement is however, rejected. There are eighty six students who strongly agree and sixty eight who agree with the statement. It also highlights that fifty eight percent students confirm that they lose interest in the classroom activities when they are carried out in English language.

The second last item of the questionnaire consists of the statement ‘I avoid to take initiative in classroom activities because of English as an LOI at intermediate level’. The same is converted to problem statement for quantitative analysis that is there is no significant difference of opinion among the students regarding item number nine. The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test concludes that the null hypothesis mentioned above in the form of statement of the problem is however, rejected. There are one hundred and fourteen students who strongly agree and eighty two

agree with the statement. The results however emphasize that there are seventy four percent students who confirm that they avoid initiatives in the classroom activities because of English as an LOI which definitely reflects the effect of language shift on the interest of the students in the process of education.

The last item of the questionnaire states that 'LOI should not be changed at intermediate level'. The same is converted into a problem statement for quantitative analysis that is there is no significant difference of opinion among the students regarding change of LOI at intermediate level.

The interpretation of the results of Chi-Square Test however, conclude that one hundred and twenty five students strongly agree and seventy four agree with the statement. The results however, highlight that seventy five percent students are not in favor of language shift at intermediate level which definitely have effect the interest of the students for learning.

Findings and Conclusion

Change of LOI, language shift or language switching at any level does have its multidimensional impact on the students as well as teachers. The research in hand was solely meant to analyze language shift at intermediate level and its effect on students' interest for learning. The study was delimited to the students of intermediate level. Data was collected from the second year students of the public sector colleges of Karachi. Only those students were part of the sample size who were taught in Urdu-medium schools at secondary level. The study comprises major and minor or main and subsidiary hypotheses. The major hypothesis reflects that **H₀**: Male and female students will not have difference of opinion regarding effect of language shift at intermediate level on their interest for learning. The hypothesis was rejected and it was established that there was significant difference of opinion among male and female students regarding effect of language shift on the interest of the students.

After comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire it was concluded that language shift especially at intermediate level had significant negative effect on the interest of the students in the process of education. The students were realized quite comfortable with their mother tongue as well as national language Urdu in their curricular as well as extracurricular activities. The students were found quite disturbed because of language shift from indigenous to foreign language that is from Urdu to English. They confirmed that because of language restrictions they were not taking initiatives for classroom academic discussions or activities. Concerned teachers have also been reported not encouraging the students to use English language in the classroom discourse. The overwhelming majority of the students were not in favor of language shift at intermediate level. Even in their routine activities like newspaper, magazine, novel or play/drama reading, playground discourse, family discourse etc. they were quite comfortable with Urdu. In terms of electronic media they were found mostly interested Urdu-medium satellite and TV

channels. The findings of the present research demand that language policy regarding language shift in Pakistan may be thoroughly reviewed solely in favor of the majority students. Instead of taking care of the foreign interests we should take decisions in the interests of the majority population of Pakistan. Language choice for LOI is quite critical and it should be solely motivated by our own interests and in accordance with comfort zone of our own students for their better academic achievements.

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