TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN A PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how teachers perceive use of regional languages in content courses in a Pakistani classroom at both undergraduate and graduate level. Results of a survey (five point Likert-type), administered to 120 teachers from both natural and sciences at a public sector university in Islamabad and three public sector universities at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa indicate that use of regional languages is significantly frequent in Pakistani university classrooms. In addition, an excessive use of regional languages escalates teachers' consciousness about the limiting role with regard to practicing TL. Participants strongly advocate maximum use of TL in classrooms for preparing students to achieve the required level of proficiency in TL. This study has both policy and classroom implications for maximizing use of TL in Pakistani university classrooms.

Keywords: *Regional languages, Code-switching, Teachers' perceptions & Multilingualism*

INTRODUCTION

The role of bilingualism has variedly been discussed with regard to either as a facilitator in language or vice versa (Atkinson, 1987; Canagarajah, 1995, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Sichyova, 2005). There are no linguistic considerations about any language as good or bad, it is rather a matter of socio-politico-economic perspectives (García, & Sylvan, 2011; Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012) that play vital role in defining and determining the status (Hornberger & Link, 2012) the future of language(s). Keeping in view the present global world scenario, and English being considered as a vital pre-requisite to many social roles (Sichyova, 2005), the significance of English language could not be overlooked. A plausible explanation is that English has achieved the status of *lingua franca (emphasis added)* and it has cultural, ideological, and above all, the elitist power (Kachru, 1997).

English is the official language in Pakistan (Constitution of Pakistan, p. 112), and the medium of instruction beyond the 10th grade of schooling in addition to its use in office correspondence, judiciary, and the media. The national language of Pakistan is Urdu, which has very limited use in private schools. Nevertheless, Urdu is used as the language of instruction in public schools till the 10th grade. Such a diverse scenario in Pakistan makes the use of Urdu and other regional languages one of the key factors affecting students' English language proficiency and teaching practices.

Moreover, English is the language of instruction at the undergraduate and graduate level of studies. However, excessive use of regional languages, particularly Urdu or frequent code-switching makes the use of English very minimal in a classroom. In this study, I will refer to the use of regional languages and code-switching interchangeably, and I will take into consideration the use of both Urdu and other regional language in a classroom as a whole where the use of other regional languages is very minimal compared to the use of Urdu. Benson (2001) refers to code-switching as an adjustment process that the speaker habitually articulates, which provides opportunities for the listener to learn certain attitudes swiftly, meanings and types of meanings rigorously comprehensible within that particular socio-cultural network. In the context of Pakistan, both students and teachers might have varying perceptions about the use of regional languages in tertiary level of education as Urdu and other regional languages are not only used in terms of individuals' preferences, but also to ensure that learners feel at home and follow the lesson(s) properly.

Contemporary research on the use of L1 or code-switching (e.g., Atkinson, 1987; Canagarajah, 1995, 2011; Nation, 1997; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Swain, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) advocates judicious use of L1 in a classroom on the grounds that bilinguals bring the entire social networks inside the classroom they consistently apply in outside settings as they feel comfortable in language learning setting and eventually increase their learning (Martínez, 2010). Nevertheless, there is no single and concrete answer to the query whether using learners' L1 serves either as an impediment or a resource in a classroom (Cook, 2001). It is a commonly held concept that use of regional languages or code-switching does not affect the syntactical structures of the target language (Martínez, 2010; Poplack, 1988,2000), but my assumption is that excessive use of regional languages or code-switching might affect learners' English language speaking proficiency to a significant extent. In order to analyze the perception of both students and teachers about the use of regional languages in a Pakistani classroom, this study will answer the following questions.

> ➢ How frequently teachers use regional languages in a classroom?
> ➢ How do teachers perceive frequent use of regional language(s) in classrooms despite English being the language of instruction?
> ➢ Which language(s) might be more beneficial for classroom interaction and TL learning?

While looking for plausible answers to these questions, this study explores the extent of acceptability of using regional languages in a classroom not only with regard to their role in facilitating learning, but also their role in enhancing or undermining proficiency in TL. The motivation for this study is the discontent expressed both by teachers at different occasions and my own observation while teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at both undergraduate and graduate level. This study is not limited to teachers having English as their major but also incorporates the perceptions of teachers from different majors in social and natural sciences.

Research on Regional Language(s) Use in Classroom Setting

For the last three decades discussion on translanguaging or code-switching turned out to be one of the important areas of research in the field of sociolinguistics and English Language Teaching both in ESL and EFL context. Haugen (1953) is considered to be the pioneer in introducing the concept of code-switching in language discourse but Benson (2001) argues that discussion of code-switching as a framework demonstrates "interference" and "low grade intelligence" as it is a discourse tool that proficient bilinguals use in different linguistic discourses. Kachru (1985, 1997) legitimized code-switching as a significant phenomenon in second language acquisition while Scotton (1993) and Poplack (1988, 2000) declared code-switching as a discourse strategy used by bilinguals having high linguistic skills in the languages involved in discourse. While taking code-switching in cultural settings, bilinguals communicate through employing a unique kind of language system in some significant social circumstances. Consequently, recent research considers code-switching as an important social situation where bilinguals communicate using a "unique language system" representing their cultural setting. Baker (2008) believes that it is a natural language change, which takes place as a result of persistent cultural, social, and political assimilations and alterations around the globe.

Sociolinguistic researchers (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Backus, 2012; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Sylvan, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Pennycook, 2010) have a significant contribution to the study of code-switching declaring it a social process that facilitates the construction and interpretation of bilingual experience as a social reality through language system used in a peculiar way. According to Heller (1988) who studied patterns of code-switching in the context of linguistic and social constraints, bilinguals are supposed to rely on available linguistic resources due to political, ideologies and social boundaries. Taken in social framework, code-switching helps in understanding social hierarchy of languages which play significant role in helping to determine what kind of language is useful in terms of when and where (Callahan, 2004). Some researchers (Azevedo, 1991; Drapeau, 1995; Meisel, 2004; Sounkalo, 1995) found code-switching as a "hindrance" in the way of achieving the desired level of competence in target language (L2). The study conducted by Hancock (1997) witnessed that not all "L1 is bad" and he found the use of L1 or code-switching is very useful and productive when students used their L1 in group work. This group work takes place when students communicate with one another in order to clarify and complete certain tasks in a group work and use their L1 among their peers. Hancock (1997) also found that code-switching also helps in saving teaching time, and results in improved performance of learners in a given span of time.

Higgins, (2003), found that code-switching practiced by the bilingual speakers and teachers in oral communication is a facilitating factor and also suggests its use in writing in order to provide suggestions for future pedagogical implications. Majority of the recent studies hold the notion

that code-switching to L1 facilitates learning (Scott & Fuenta, 2008), but the perceptions of both teachers and students in terms of its effects on L2 proficiency needs to be explored in order to validate such claims. The argument put forward by researchers (Scott & Fuenta, 2008) that bilinguals who usually employ code-switching in their discourse or speaking are proficient speakers as they have the proficiency to use their languages interchangeably. Previous research (Hancock, 1997; Higgins, 2003; Kachru, 1985; Moore, 2013; Scott & La Fuenta, 2008) about bilingualism and code-switching supports its judicious use as a facilitator in teaching and learning, but no research has been conducted to find out the perceptions of both teachers and students about the use of regional languages in both social and natural sciences in Pakistani context.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

As this study focuses on investigating perceptions of teachers about the use of regional languages in Pakistani universities, a twelve items Likert-type survey (see Appendix A) was administered to the participants. The response options ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and never to often depending on the nature of questions this study endeavors to answer. A total of 200 surveys were distrusted among the participants, out of which, 150 were filled and turned in. Only 120 surveys were usable because 30 of them were eliminated either due to incompleteness or having more than a one answer ticked for a single item. Participants comprise teachers, males and females, having different majors, and were selected from three public sector universities at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and a public sector university at Islamabad through convenience sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Among the participants, 64 (40 males and 24 females) were from social sciences and 56 (36 males and 20 females) were from natural sciences. The responses obtained through surveys were thoroughly examined and perceptions of teachers about using either regional languages or TL in classrooms were analyzed in accordance with the research questions of the study.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For examining teachers' perceptions of using regional languages thoroughly, data collected via a survey developed in accordance with research questions of the study, were analyzed. Three key aspects, first, frequency of regional language or code-switching; second, perceptions students and teachers about using regional languages; and finally teaching either in TL only, which is English or L1 only. It is worth mentioning that in Pakistan all teachers are either bilingual or multilingual, so the use of regional languages is primarily interpreted as the use of Urdu instead of English and occasional instances of the use of other regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, etc. depending on the location of the institution.

Teachers' responses in regard to use of languages other than TL profoundly characterize their concerns and are of significant value because their position and stance can be judged with regard

to how students and teachers see the use of regional language(s)in classrooms. A thorough analysis of the data suggests that bilingual teachers easily and successfully transmit concepts through using language(s) other than TL. In such circumstances, use of regional languages usually works as a useful resource. Nonetheless the use of regional languages increases consciousness about their role in attaining proficiency in TL. This circumstantial bilingual experience of using regional language(s) and TL in classroom discourses on the part of teachers might not be accepted as unquestioned resource utilization for mutual intelligibility as it has been practiced at the cost of proficiency in TL. In order to validate the above argument(s) in regard to teachers' perceptions of using regional languages on TL learning, the results obtained from the data are presented as under.

Table 1 Teachers' Perceptions of Frequency of Using Regional Languages

Field of Study	Gender	*N (%)	*R (%)	*NS (%)	*S (%)	*O (%)
Social Sciences	Male	4 (10)	6 (15)	4 (10)	10 (25)	16 (40)
	Female	3 (12.5)	3 (12.5)	3 (12.5)	6 (25)	9 (37.5)
Natural Sciences	Male	3 (8.3)	9 (25)	2 (5.6)	6 (16.7)	16 (44.4)
	Female	2 (10)	5 (25)	1 (5)	8 (40)	4(20)

* Never = N; Rarely = R; Not Sure = NS; Sometimes = S; and Often = O

Item 1 through item 4 in the survey administered to teacher participants contained questions about the frequency of using regional languages in classrooms. Table 2 indicates that teacher participants showed varying opinions about the frequency of using regional languages in classrooms. Among male teachers from social sciences, 10% expressed that they never use languages other than English while speaking in a classroom, 15% of them were of the opinion that they rarely use regional languages, 10% were not sure, 25% were of the view that they use languages other than TL sometimes, and 40% of them expressed the fact that regional languages are used quite often in classrooms despite the fact that English is the language of instruction at the university level. Among female teachers, 12.5% expressed that they never use regional languages in classroom discussions, 12.5% opted for rare use of regional languages, 12.5% were not sure, whereas 25% expressed that they sometimes use regional languages in a classroom, and 37.5% of them expressed that they use regional languages quite often. The overall response about frequency of using regional languages (both Never and Rarely) among teachers from social sciences (both male and female), that is, 25% compared to the frequency (both Sometimes and Often), that is 64% indicates that regional languages are frequently used in a classroom despite the fact that TL is the language of instruction at the university level of studies in Pakistan.

Similarly, among teachers from natural sciences 8.3% expressed that they never use languages other than English while speaking in a classroom, 25% of them were of the opinion that they rarely use regional languages, 5.6% were not sure, 16.7% were of the view that they use languages other than TL sometimes, and 44.4% of them expressed the fact that regional

languages are used quite often in classrooms despite the fact that English is the language of instruction at the university level. Among female teachers, 10% expressed that they never use languages other than English while speaking in a classroom, 25% opted for rare use of regional languages, 5% were not sure, 40% expressed that they sometimes use regional languages in a classroom, and 20% of them expressed that they use regional languages quite often. The overall response about frequency of using regional languages (both Never and Rarely) among teachers from natural sciences (both male and female), that is, 33.9% compared to the frequency (both Sometimes and Often), which is 60.7% indicates that regional languages are frequently used in a classroom despite the fact that TL is the language of instruction at the university level of studies in Pakistan. Taken as whole, students' opinion indicates that using regional languages at the place of TL is a common practice in classrooms. A higher frequency of using regional languages on the participants' part indicates that the use of regional languages in classroom is very high that carries the potential of providing very limited opportunities of practicing TL for the learners and might work as a hurdle in the way of achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL.

The second part of the survey comprised questions about the role of using regional languages in TL learning. In the following section, I will discuss participants' responses with regard to the role that regional languages play in TL learning.

Table 2 Teachers' Perceptions of Regional Languages' Role in TL

Field of Study	Gender	*SD (%)	*D (%)	*NS (%)	*A (%)	*SA (%)
Social Sciences	Male	4(10)	6 (15)	4 (10)	12 (30)	14 (35)
	Female	3 (12.5)	6 (25)	0 (0)	6 (25)	9 (37.5)
Natural Sciences	Male	5 (13.9)	8 (22.2)	2 (5.6)	7 (19.4)	14 (38.9)
	Female	5 (10)	2 (10)	1 (5)	7 (35)	8 (40)

*Strongly Disagree = SD; Disagree = D; Not Sure = NS; Agree = A; Strongly Agree = A

Item 5 through item 8 in the survey administered to teacher participants contained questions about the role that regional language(s) play in TL learning. Table 4 shows teachers' responses about the effects of using regional languages on students' proficiency in TL. Among male teachers from social sciences, 10% expressed a strong disagreement, 15% of them disagreed, 10% were not sure, 30% agreed, and 35% of them strongly agreed that frequent use of regional languages in classrooms negatively affects students' English language proficiency. Among female teachers, 12.5% strongly disagreed, 25% disagreed, none of them opted for not sure, 25% agreed, and 37.5% strongly agreed. The overall level of disagreement (both male and female) among teachers from social sciences, that is, 29.7% compared to the level of agreement, that is, 64% indicates that majority of the teachers from social sciences showed concerns about the negative effects of using regional languages in classrooms.

Similarly, among male teachers from natural sciences 13.9% strongly disagreed, 22.2% agreed, 5.6% were not sure, 19.4% agreed, and 38.9% of them strongly agreed that regional languages are frequently used in classrooms despite the fact that English is the language of instruction at the university level. Among female teachers, 10% strongly disagreed, 10% disagreed, 5% were not sure, 35% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed. The overall level of disagreement (both male and female) among teachers from natural sciences, that is, 35.7% shows lower level of disagreement, compared to the level of agreement, that is, 64.3% indicates that majority of the teachers showed concerns about the negative effects of using regional languages in a classroom. Taken as whole, teachers' opinions indicate that using regional languages instead of TL is a common practice in classrooms that carries the potential of working a barrier toward achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL.

It is worth mentioning that teachers might be using regional languages due to circumstantial needs for swift communication. Nevertheless, majority of the participants showed consciousness that frequent use of regional languages in a classroom might delay achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL. With the exception of the defensive role played by the use of regional languages, that is, to bridge the communication gap, the overall picture of the responses signifies that there is consciousness about lack of proficiency in TL, which pushes teachers to rely on regional languages most of the times. It is therefore, not out of context to say that such type of casual and causal use of some lexical item on the part of teachers from L1 for clarifying any message has the potential to harms students' proficiency in TL. A plausible explanation is that teachers develop a perception that a message might not be understood properly if not transmitted through using either a complete lexical structure from learners' L1 or some codes of L1. One of the harmful results could be that while participating in any kind of academic discussion in a classroom, teachers' excessive use of regional languages might push students to prepare a response in L1 and then translate the message in TL that might cause delay in developing the desired level of proficiency in TL. In the following section, I will discuss participants' perceptions of the preferred language(s) in a classroom.

Table 3 Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching in Target language/Regional Languages

Field of Study	Gender	*SD (%)	*D (%)	*NS (%)	*A (%)	*SA (%)
Social Sciences	Male	8 (20)	6 (15)	2 (5)	12 (30)	12 (30)
	Female	4 (16.7)	3 (12.5)	3 (12.5)	6 (25)	8 (33.3)
Natural Sciences	Male	3 (8.3)	9 (25)	3 (8.3)	11 (30.6)	10 (27.8)
	Female	6 (30)	1 (5)	2 (10)	6 (30)	5 (25)

*Strongly Disagree = SD; Disagree = D; Not Sure = NS; Agree = A; Strongly Agree = A

Item 9 through item 12 in the survey administered to teacher participants contained questions about the preferred languages(s) of instruction in a classroom. Table 6 indicates that among male teachers from social sciences, 20% expressed a strong disagreement, 15% of them disagreed, 5%

were not sure, 30% agreed, and 30% of them strongly agreed that the use regional languages in classrooms should be minimized to the possible extent.. Among female teachers, 16.7% strongly disagreed, 12.5% disagreed, 12.5% were not sure, 25% agreed, and 33.3% strongly agreed. The overall level of disagreement (both male and female) among teachers from social sciences, that is, 33.9% compared to the level of agreement, that is, 64% indicates that regional languages are frequently used in a classroom despite the fact that TL is the language of instruction at the university level of studies in Pakistan.

Similarly, among teachers from natural sciences 8.3% strongly disagreed, 25% agreed, 5.6% were not sure, 16.7% agreed, and 44.4% of them strongly agreed that regional languages are frequently used in classrooms despite the fact that English is the language of instruction at the university level. Among female teachers, 10% strongly disagreed, 25% disagreed, 5% were not sure, 40% agreed, and 20% strongly agreed. The overall level of disagreement (both male and female) among teachers from natural sciences, that is, 33.9% compared to the level of disagreement among teachers from social sciences, which is 57.1% indicates that majority of the teachers from social sciences prefer TL as the language of instruction at the university level of studies in Pakistan. A plausible explanation might be that teachers from natural sciences prefer delivery of content through regional languages effectively and are less concerned about improving their students' proficiency in TL.

Data used in this study were collected from teachers of different majors. Nevertheless, the range of attitudes and perceptions with regard to use of regional languages showed similar opinions about the frequency of using regional languages in classrooms, consequences of using regional languages with regard to proficiency in TL, with the exception that teachers from natural sciences prefer regional languages to TL as the preferred language of instruction at a university level. Nevertheless, the level of disagreement is very minimal. Many researchers (e.g., Hancock, 1997; Higgins, 2003; Kachru, 1985; Scott & La Fuenta, 2008) argue that judicious use of L1 helps in making the class linguistically homogeneous. Nevertheless, the present study shows different results. In line with the previous research on the negative effects of code-switching or L1 on TL proficiency (e.g., Atkinson, 1987; Drapeau, 1995; Meisel, 2004; Sounkalo, 1995) excessive use of regional languages risks achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL. A plausible explanation is that frequent use of regional languages in classrooms usually leads students to think that they do not understand until and unless the content is translated into their L1. In case of taking code-switching as a teaching and learning tool, it is very difficult to mark the line for its use so that it may not become a technique of translating target language purely into L1. Such circumstances might lead students to think about wasting their time in excessive use of their L1 at the cost of proficiency in TL (Hopkins, 1988).

According to Azevedo, (1991), the process of selection and decision-making about code-switching usually involves translation from L2 to L1 or vice versa due to "socio-cultural and political connotations" and affects TL/L2 proficiency. Consequently, apprehensions associated with the excessive use of regional languages necessitates that both teachers and the students should constantly decide how and when to use or to avoid using regional languages to the possible extent in classroom discussions. Findings of this study suggest that although use of regional languages facilitates communication and solidarity with both teachers and students but their excessive use has a significant potential for delaying the achievement of desired proficiency TL. Findings of this study also indicate that although teachers use regional languages in classrooms, but they do not consider their excessive use as one of the suitable options for the purpose of swift communication. For them, use of regional languages offers very less facilitation compared to their work as a barrier in the way of achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL.

CONCLUSION

After a thorough analysis of the data, it can be concluded that excessive use of regional languages in a classroom interferes in TL learning due to the following reasons. First, due to teachers' consciousness (Palmer & Martínez, 2013) about students' inabilities to properly communicate in TL and second, taking into consideration students having very limited opportunities of practicing TL in classrooms. Participants' responses showed that the frequency of using regional languages is very high, but this is not one of the desirable strategies of facilitating TL learning. Although regional languages are extensively used as a valuable strategy for communication among teachers and students at tertiary level of education in Pakistan, nonetheless results of the study strongly support the idea of teaching and learning only in TL. We cannot, therefore come up with overgeneralized conclusions(s) that consistent use of regional languages along with TL is taken for granted rationale for mutual intelligibility, enhancing students' communicative capabilities, and accelerating teaching and learning process in a bilingual or multilingual classroom. It is mandatory to look for proper solutions to minimize the use of regional languages in Pakistani university classrooms. The first step toward attaining the goal of minimizing the use of regional languages is to adopt teaching strategies that rely mostly on the use of TL and help in eliminating the use of L1 in academic settings.

If both teachers and students are allowed to frequently use either regional languages or their L1 in classrooms, achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL might become a difficult task. Using regional languages, therefore, might be used as an effective teaching method but we might not rely on it as an effective technique for acquiring the desired level of proficiency in TL. Hence, classroom activities should not be regional languages driven on account of bridging the communication gap at the cost of achieving the desired level of proficiency in TL. We may, thus, speak of using regional languages as a source of mutual intelligibility (Creese & Blackledge,

2010) but their excessive integration into the classroom needs to be revisited keeping in view its potential for delaying achieving proficiency in TL.

It is worth mentioning that findings of the present study could not be overgeneralized and hasty conclusions might not be drawn as the data collected for this study are not exactly applicable to all situations depending on learners' proficiency in TL, L1, geography, and language status, etc. Moreover, this study is based on a limited number of participants (N = 200) from four public sector universities in Pakistan where teachers frequently use either Urdu or other regional languages. Nevertheless, it endeavors to investigate and address the issues associated the excessive use of regional languages and the role they play in learning TL. Since the present study is limited to four public sector universities in the province of KP and federal capital Islamabad, Pakistan, findings of the present study could be elaborated further and evaluated through interviews and classroom observations. Perceptions of teachers and students about the deficiencies of speaking skills could also be recorded in order to design practical and goal-oriented English language teaching practices. A longitudinal study of the similar kind might also be of a significant scope in different sociocultural and academic contexts.

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