

To use or not to use: The role of mother tongue in English Medium Education

By:

Liaquat A. Channa, PhD.

Balochistan University of I.T, Engineering & Management Sciences (BUIEMS), Quetta

Contents

Clarification of the terms

- **Mother tongue (MT):** MT refers here to the local language other than Target Language (TL). First language (L1) may also be used interchangeably with MT.
- **An English medium education class:** It may not only be a content class where content of the subjects such as science, mathematics, etc. is solely taught in English.

- **English medium education** class may also be a class where an TL such as English is taught as a second or foreign language solely in TL medium.
- **Foreign language context:** It is the context where classroom is the only place to learn a TL and students share an L1 (Littlewood & Yu, 2009).

- **Idealized cognition (Imran & Wyatt, 2015):** An idealized cognition is an ideal mindset/perspective/attitude about something that is imaginary and ideal and that lives in only human wishful thinking.
- **Classroom behavior (Imran & Wyatt, 2015):** Classroom behavior refers to the unfolding of participatory events involving an instructor and students.

Teachers

Imran & Wyatt (2015)

- “It is evident from the data presented above that the idealized cognitions of all three teachers supported the exclusive use of the TL.”
- “... these teachers argued against the classroom use of L1. They indicated it would reduce the comprehensible input available (Murad) and interfere with TL acquisition (Waseem)... Hasan went one step further by suggesting that the university should make it obligatory to speak English with students outside class, i.e. elsewhere on the campus, so that the standard of their English could improve.

Manan, David & Dumanig (2004)



Personal Experiences

- Experienced Fine System as a student.
- Came across teachers and parents who wanted an exclusive use of TL in schools.
- Heard about notifications issued by “private elite English medium institutions” (Rahman, 1996, 2001, 1999, 2002) prohibiting the use of local languages, and sometimes Urdu, in their precincts.

Students

- Rahman (1999)
- Mansoor (1993)
- Mahboob (2002)

Teachers' three positions & Guilt

- **The virtual position:**
Wanting to use the TL exclusively
- **The maximal position:**
Wanting to use the TL as much as possible, with L1 use viewed prejudicially.
- **The optimal position:**
Wanting to use the L1 purposefully and 'judiciously' for benefit

(Macaro, 2011 in Imean & Wyatt, 2015)

What unfolds in classroom behavior?

- Many studies have confirmed that teachers not only code-switch but also use Urdu and/or local languages in their English classes (Gulzar, 2010; Manan, David & Dumanig, 2004; Manan, 2016; Rahman, 2001; Shamim, 2008, 2011; Tamim, 2013).

The Questions

- How has the “monolingual principle”—to use only the TL in classes—shaped teachers to desire an exclusive TL use?
- Whether there is any theoretical justification for using MT in English education classes?
- What does research say about how systematically MT can be used in English education classes?

How has the “monolingual principle”—to use only the TL in classes—has lasted and shaped a mindset desiring an exclusive TL use?

Reasons

- Interference of language systems
- Language balloon (Baker, 0000; Lin, 2015)
- One-sided application of Krashen's maximum input hypothesis (Lin, 2015)
- Successive emergence of the ELT approaches in the West and we the consumers in the East (Mahboob, 2011)

Whether there is any theoretical justification for using MT in English education classes?

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

- MT/L1 as a mediational tool and languaging
- Everyday and Scientific concepts
- Situation Definition, Zone of proximal development (ZPD), and scaffolding
- Intersubjectivity

What does scholarship say about how systematically MT can be used in English education classes?

Cook's (2001) ways of using an L1 positively

- “Teacher use of L1 to convey and check meanings of words or sentences”
- “Teacher use of L1 for explaining grammar”
- “Teacher use of L1 for organizing tasks”
- “Teacher maintenance of discipline through L1”

- “Teacher gaining contact with individual students through the L1”
- “Student use of L1 as part of the main learning activity”
- “Bringing the L1 back from exile may lead not only to the improvements of existing teaching methods but also to innovations in methodology.” (Cook, 2001, p. 419)

Littlewood & Yu (2009)

- “At the presentation stage, the L1 can be used an efficient way of clarifying the meanings of words, structures or utterances, so that students can progress more quickly to the more important stage of active use and internalization.”

- “At the practice stag, a key component of the bilingual method is the drill-like use of L1 stimuli to elicit equivalent target structures. An important feature is that equivalence lies not at the word level but at the level of meaning: meanings are implanted into the learner’s cognitive system and then re-expressed through the TL.”

- “At the production stage, teachers may design activities in which students start from situations of L1 use and these serve as input or stimuli for TL use.”

Mahboob & Lin (2016)

- **“Ideational functions:** Providing basic-TL (target language)-proficiency students with access to the TL-mediated curriculum by switching to the students’ local languages (LL) to translate or annotate (e.g., key TL terms), explain, elaborate or exemplify TL academic content”

- **“Textual functions:** Highlighting (signalling) topic shifts, marking out transitions between different activity types or different focuses (e.g., focusing on technical definitions of terms vs. exemplifications of the terms in students’ everyday life).”

- **“Interpersonal functions:** Signalling and negotiating shifts in frames and footings, role-relationships and identities, change in social distance/closeness (e.g., negotiating for in-group solidarity), and appealing to shared cultural values or institutional norms.”

Conclusion