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Investigating Translanguaging Practices in Undergraduate English Classrooms in a Pakistani University

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Abstract
The study explores translanguaging practices in compulsory undergraduate English classes at a public university in Karachi, Pakistan, by examining classroom observations and short post-observation interviews with five English teachers. Using a non-participant observational design and thematic analysis, six themes emerged: (1) Urdu as a tool for comprehension; (2) Urdu for comfort, motivation, and classroom rapport; (3) students' linguistic background and educational inequality; (4) cultural and national identity justification; (5) translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy versus ideological objection; and (6) teachers' expectations of student reactions shaping language choices. Findings indicate that teachers deliberately use Urdu to scaffold difficult content, reduce student anxiety, build rapport, and bridge gaps from unequal prior education, while some express concerns that excessive L1 use may impede English acquisition. The study concludes that translanguaging functions as a culturally sensitive, pragmatic classroom strategy whose effectiveness depends on instructional aims, teacher beliefs, and student proficiency. Implications include recommending curricular guidance and flexible language policies that permit principled L1 use to promote equity and comprehension. Limitations are the small sample and single-institution scope, restricting generalizability; further research across diverse Pakistani universities is suggested.

Keywords: Translanguaging, Urdu, Scaffolding, Multilingual pedagogy, Higher education

Introduction

Translanguaging is defined as the practice of blending all of a student's language reservoir while learning, hence allowing them to discuss ideas and collaborate better using not only the target language but also Urdu and regional languages (García & Li, 2014). For a good number of undergraduate students in a Pakistani university, participating in English classes is challenging due to varied language backgrounds. Students, if allowed to use Urdu or native language in addition to English, tend to perform better as they can take part in classroom activities easily (Mushtaq, 2023). Translanguaging, if employed well can enhance students' confidence and boost their identity. This is the reason, translanguaging is considered as a useful teaching method since engaging students in their home language yields better results. Educators believe that students speaking their home language is not detrimental, in fact it brings forward better outcomes in terms of language competence. However it brings challenges for the teachers who will have to evaluate students on a multiple language scale. The concept of translanguaging opposes the idea that university teaching should only utilize English as the medium of instruction; in fact English teaching at university level must welcome a multilingual perspective (Ali, Azim & Rehman, 2024). To investigate this idea further, the perspective of English teachers is significant as it will strengthen the notion whether translanguaging is the suitable choice or not and if it is

then how to employ it for greater impact (Samar & Pathan, 2022). This research examines the use of translanguaging by English teachers and students in compulsory English classes at a public sector university in Karachi, Pakistan. By following the classroom observational research (non-participant) method, classroom observations and teachers' informal interviews have been conducted to find out the reasons behind translanguaging practices and the kind of perceptions teachers have about translanguaging.

Research Questions

1. How do English language teachers engage in translanguaging practices while teaching ?
2. How do ESL teachers perceive translanguaging in the university classroom?

Literature Review

Translanguaging is the phenomenon that has emerged in bilingual education as one of the sign to check students' competence to utilize their complete language reservoir to express themselves in opposition to using distinct languages. Baker (20211) argues that translanguaging is the ongoing process of creating different sets of meanings that enables students to improve understanding and knowledge by utilizing two languages. There is a distinction between translanguaging and code switching as the former highlights intentional and adaptable language use while the latter is defined as the random language switch by the speaker, without any objective. This implies that translanguaing can serve as a useful teaching method that promotes learning hence the language resources of multilingual students should be acknowledged instead of sidelining them (García & Li, 2014).

Translanguaging in the Pakistani University Context

English is the medium of instruction at higher education level in Pakistan but the students are bringing with them a variety of cultures hence the environment is highly multilingual. It enables teachers as well as students to use Urdu and other regional languages additionally. Hussain & Khan (2021) assert that only a small number of lecturers and students would use regional languages in parallel to English. This establishes the notion that translanguaging does occur in Pakistani universities but its application formally is still rare and mostly dependent on the teacher's consent. This also develops the idea that teachers of English identify the benefits associated with translanguaging such as helping the below average students as suggested by Mushtaq (2023). There are favorable outcomes witnessed by both teachers and students including better content comprehension while strengthening students' bilingual identities. Teachers have also argued that translanguaging improves communication competence and creates better inclusivity among students attending the same class thus they all are able to appreciate diverse cultures. Translanguaging is therefore a method to "decolonize" English language education while keeping classrooms inclusive of regional as well as national language Urdu where students can also maintain their distinct identities (Javaid et al.).

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the classroom observational research (non-participant) has been conducted where the researcher has observed the natural setting without taking part in the activity (Dörnyei, 2007) hence allowing events to unfold naturally. The researcher has also documented the field notes that include classroom interactions and examples of language use. As recommended by Dörnyei (2007), the researcher has asked 2 clarifying questions from the teacher as part of follow-up short elicitation interview soon after the observations.

The following two questions have been asked:

1. Why did you use Urdu while teaching?/ Why did you use Urdu language in class?
2. What kind of reactions did you hope to see from students after you switched languages from English to Urdu?

Data Collection Methods

Teachers' Interviews

The collection of data took place at University of Karachi. in the following departments

1. English
2. International Relations
3. General Histroy
4. Library Sciences
5. Political Science

During the data collection cycle, five teachers of English were interviewed with their consent (Appendix B) who were given the responsibility to teach the compulsory English course at undergraduate level. The questions asked focused on the teacher's perspectives and conviction to follow translanguaging or not. Each interview took around 3 minutes and was recorded audibly and transcribed word-for word (Dörnyei, 2007). The interviews offered understanding of the reasons behind the observed classroom practices.

Classroom Observations

Five classes of compulsory English, of each participating teacher, were observed, all were of undergraduate level. The classroom observations were documented by using Classroom Observation Checklist (Appendix A). The goal of observing the classrooms was to recognize and record translanguaging during English classes. Each classroom observation lasted for 20 to 30 minutes approximately.

Discussion

Thematic Analysis

As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), for thematic analysis data was transcribed and coded for identifying the emerging themes. Miles et al. (2014) recommend the use of visual coding techniques such as colorcoding to organize observational data and identify recurring themes. To maintain confidentiality and ensure anonymity further (Dörnyei, 2007), the given labels have been used while coding:

Teacher 1	T1
Teacher 2	T2
Teacher 3	T3
Teacher 4	T4
Teacher 5	T5
Interviewer	I

The following six themes have been identified and color-coded to present the thematic analysis:

1. Urdu as a Tool for Comprehension (yellow)
2. Urdu for Comfort, Motivation, and Classroom Rapport (green)
3. Students' Linguistic Background and Educational Inequality(pink)
4. Cultural and National Identity Justification (purple)
5. Translanguaging as Pedagogical Strategy vs. Ideological Objection (Aqua)
6. Expected Student Reactions Shape Teachers' Choices (blue)

Theme 1 – Urdu as a Tool for Comprehension

One of the emerging themes in all five interviews conducted and classes observed is the fact that Urdu is considered as tool for comprehension. Teachers have repetitively declared Urdu as a primary source for student's comprehension. They firmly believe that the use of concise Urdu helps students build language

understanding. Hence the use of Urdu translations, explanation and instruction is based on providing the essential cues to students to gain better command over English grammatical structures and vocabulary. This is specifically valid for students who display poor English competence due to multiple reasons like prior English schooling or limited exposure to English literature. Instead of adopting Urdu casually, it is intentionally chosen as a measure of cognitive scaffolding so that students can easily grasp abstract concepts of the target language such as irregular verbs, prepositions or descriptive writing. Teachers have described Urdu as a "bridge" as one of the teachers said:

"I try to use Urdu and English both languages because it helps my students to understand the concept Because students may not understand very difficult English. And very difficult vocabulary. So, for above average students, it may be easy to understand. But for students who are weak And students, who are coming from different backgrounds, It becomes a problem. So I provide translations and I also explain A few sentences in Urdu so that students can understand the concept" (T1)

Another teacher said:

"…I was using Urdu. So that students are are feeling connected to the topic…" (T2)

Theme 2 - Urdu for Comfort, Motivation, and Classroom Rapport

Teachers have agreed that Urdu is the language that if used while teaching reduces confusion and anxiety among students. Its skillful use helps students develop grasp essential concepts of the target language i.e. English quickly thus lesson content is more accessible and learning carried out in a better way. Teachers recognize that students are from different backgrounds and fields:

"…the students are from From different backgrounds this is Genral History Department, their English is not very good. So this topic descriptive form of writing Uh this this requires, a lot of a lot of detailing and it requires a lot of explanations*…" (T4)*

But at the same time, English teachers do not give up and continue to provide Urdu equivalents of Enlish grammar rules so that students can feel assimilated.

"…sometimes I have to and it depends on the situation. It depends on the situation and It depends on the kind of students I am interacting to. So if the situation demands, if there's some kind of some kind of instance, when English sentence may not work. Then I use Urdu and Urdu sentences, you know, draw attention of students, students understand it very quickly. And You know, at initial level students need that sense of comfort also…" (T5)

Theme 3 - Students' Linguistic Background and Educational Inequality

The teaching/learning of English in Pakistani society is a sensitive topic because of varied linguistics and educational background of students. As one of the teachers has believed that the use of Urdu makes an English teacher approachable for students hence it ensures active participation and learning in a classroom.

"…Students would not feel comfortable. And students Usually do not pay attention to to those teachers who are only speaking English. They start making fun of that particular teacher that this teacher is not approachable. This teacher is is, uh, so high in standard. So in order to, you know, to be at their level, in order to make them feel comfortable And yes, as a teacher to ensure that they learn The concept of English language. So I have to use English…" (T4)

Moreover, teachers also believe Urdu provides the facility to create a positive relationship with students which is why the flow of ideas becomes better:

"…I have chosen Urdu because because to connect with my students ,
otherwise they do not understand…" (T4)

English teachers also believe that students, due to their previous language limitations, may face difficulties in understanding the instructions if kept in English entirely:

"…But for students who are weak And students, who are coming from different backgrounds, It becomes a

problem. So I provide translations and I also explain A few sentences in Urdu so that students can understand the concept…" (T1)

Theme 4 - Cultural and National Identity Justification

Teachers also recognize the status of Urdu in Pakistani society and finds it as a method to mingle with students. Their choice of using Urdu in English classes is based on the fact that Urdu is the binding force between all people representing different walks of life:

"… I think that students are are able to understand better and And Urdu becomes a bridge between myself as a teacher and between students. So it is okay to use Urdu sometimes because it is not a crime to use Urdu because this is, this is a society where would do exist or do functions very well because it's our national language…" (T2)

Teachers have asserted the fact that Urdu is a comfortable and assessable choice for them to use because students feel safe:

"…I have never seen anyone going uncomfortable with that notion Because of Urdu is Urdu. Is part of us, It is, it is the national language…" (T5)

Theme 5 - Translanguaging as Pedagogical Strategy vs. Ideological Objection

There are instances when English teachers face dilemma that on what grounds, they should be using Urdu while teaching English and it contradicts the very principle of teaching English accurately, One of the teachers has said:

"…I don't use urdu do while teaching usually, I don't, because I strictly believe that English instruction should always be In English, not in Urdu. And that is a very problem. Our students cannot learn English language properly because Most of the teachers are trying to teach English in Urdu language and it creates problem…" (T3)

English teachers agree that the use of Urdu while teaching English can serve as a limited pedagogical tool but its choice should meet the class/lesson objectives:

"…Because sometimes saying things in Urdu is better for students comprehension and in order to understand that what students are going through what teacher wants…" (T2)

Theme 6 - Expected Student Reactions Shape Teachers' Choices

Teachers have continuously agreed that students do not mind their use of Urdu in English classes, in fact students expect an English teacher to provide cultural examples in Urdu. As one of the teachers has confirmed that use of Urdu does not bring negativity in a classroom:

"…The reaction of a student says, is never negative rather.
They feel good and comfortable…" (T2)

Teachers have also stated that the use of Urdu helps students fill the academic gaps:

"…at least because Udu helps to connect with this students, students are able to fill the gaps of their previous education, and they are able to, you know, And be to understand Those those areas Which may not be clear to them earlier. So they are able to fill gaps. So, their reaction is usually very hospitable and they are happy about it…" (T5)

Conclusion

The carried out research has found that translanguaging is a common pedagogical tool in undergraduate classes at the studied Pakistani university. Teachers purposefully employ the use of Urdu language as a method of scaffolding so that students are able to follow difficult content and bridge educational gaps that may exist due to unequal linguistic backgrounds. It is also used to reduce anxiety among students who can

then build rapport with the teacher easily. Although most teachers of English consider translanguaging as a useful, practical strategy to ensure comprehension, and inclusion, some also believe that the use of Urdu is attached with ideological reservations as the excessive use of students' L1 (Urdu usually) may hamper English acquisition. Translanguaging is therefore a method of teaching that is culturally sensitive and its effectiveness is based on classroom objectives, teacher's perception and overall students' proficiency in English.

Implications

1. The translanguaging practices should be guided according to curriculum design and cultural sensitivity, especially for young English teachers. While promoting L2, the English teachers may seek help from translanguaging for explanation, scaffolding and personal reflections.
2. Instead of a strict L2 classroom setting. university language policy should promote the flexibility to use L1 as per the need hence allowing English teachers to exhibit support and equity to students belonging from diverse educational backgrounds.

Limitations

The research is limited in terms of sample size and single institution qualitative model hence the results cannot be generalized. Likewise, the findings of this research may not represent translanguaging practices across various Pakistani universities.

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