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RESEARCH PAPER

Development of Pragmatic Competence through Translanguaging among English Language Learners: ELT Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study qualitatively explores the role of translanguaging in developing pragmatic competence among English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab. The objective of this study was to analyze how translanguaging helps in developing pragmatic competence among English language learners at higher secondary school level. Using purposive sampling technique, twelve ELT teachers were interviewed for collection of qualitative data. The data was then analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that translanguaging is an effective pedagogical strategy for ELT teachers to enhance pragmatic understanding of learners by connecting English expressions with their native language and cultural backgrounds. The findings also reveal that translanguaging helps English language learners to develop their pragmatic competence by reducing foreign language anxiety and developing their confidence. The study recommends translanguaging as an effective pedagogical strategy in bridging linguistic and pragmatic gaps and advocates its integration into teacher training and curriculum to enrich ESL pedagogy in Punjab.

| **KEYWORDS** | Translanguaging, Pragmatic Competence, Speech Acts, ESL |

Introduction

English being the lingua franca of the world holds a significant position in all the major fields of life. These fields include but not limited to education, medicine, judiciary, business diplomacy etc. English is regarded as the medium of international communication because it is globally spoken as a second language. It has unique prestige and authority due to its socio economic and cross-cultural significance. This wide spread use of English as a first or second language makes English as the dominant language worldwide (Shamim, 2008).

Owing to its global importance, English has also gained a significant credibility and dominance in Pakistani education system. Besides, being an integral part of curriculum as a subject, English serves the medium of instruction in Pakistan. Historically, English was used as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities during the British era. Even after independence, English remained enjoying the same superiority in education system. One of the most important roles of English in Pakistani education system is that English is being taught as a compulsory subject from primary to graduation level in Pakistan. The inclusion of English as a mandatory subject in curriculum at early-stage warrants proficiency in English along with Urdu and other languages at early age.

However, this is also evident that despite spending considerable time in learning English and gaining reasonable vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, English language learners in Pakistan are not well proficient in English (Ali et al., 2020). They still struggle to communicate in real world interaction. The non-proficiency in English despite passage of

considerable time in learning English is attributed to many factors. Ahmad & Rao (2013) attribute the non-proficiency of English language learners in Pakistan to faulty teaching methods being employed in ELT classrooms. Bhatti et al. (2019) states that over emphasis on reading and writing skills leads towards poor fluency in English language as listening and speaking skills which are more communicative in nature are ignored. Rahman (2020) suggests that poor fluency of English is largely due to the fact that English is taught by alienating it from cultural norms and values. English language learners are not provided practice to understand social norms, body language and meaning generated by intonation and pitch. Lack of cultural exposure results in poor comprehension and poor fluency of English language learners despite their mastery over grammatical structure and vocabulary.

Pragmatic competence is of great significance in second or foreign language teaching because it creates conducive environment for second language learners to develop and use their communication skill in real communicative environment (Taguchi, 2011). Pragmatic competence involves mastery over various skills such as conversational implicature, social and cultural norms and understanding and production of speech acts. It enables second language learners to develop an understanding of social and cultural context, develop meaningful interactions and use appropriate language accordingly. Hidayani et al. (2023) suggests that pragmatic competence in second language teaching enhances second language learners' communicative abilities to use language in real life environment. Therefore, integrating pragmatic practices in second language teaching enhances students' ability to practice pragmatic skills in second language.

Punjab is the most populous and culturally rich province of Pakistan. Punjab is agricultural hub and economic powerhouse of the country. Education system in Punjab is looked after by School Education Department (SED) and Higher Education Department (HED). These departments are responsible for quality of education in schools, colleges and universities including policy formulation, curriculum developments, assessment and teachers' training. Punjab has made considerable improvement in quality of education by taking different type of initiatives which includes enrolment of students at different level, reducing dropout rate and improving infrastructure (Abdullah et al., 2017). English has gained significance position in education system in Punjab. English language learning starts from primary level in Punjab. To uplift the standard of English language teaching across province, School Education Department of Punjab arranges teachers' trainings for English language teachers in Punjab in collaboration with international organizations like British Council and UNICEF.

Communicative competence has been given central position in all the education policies from primary to higher secondary level in Punjab. Recently launched Single National Curriculum (SNC) lays greater emphasis on communicative competence and speech act. Similarly in National Curriculum Framework (2006) for secondary and higher secondary levels, communicative competence has been given central importance. Pragmatic competence being an important construct of communicative competence has been given central importance in English language syllabus. All the student learning outcomes (SLO) has been formulated while focusing functional aspects of English language, speech acts and pragmatic competence.

However, the pragmatic competence of students from primary to university level is still not satisfactory. There are various studies conducted in Punjab which reported low pragmatic competence of English language learners. Asif et al. (2019) for instance, claim that pragmatic competence of English language learners in Punjab is poor. English language learners gain mastery over English language but they cannot communicate in real

life situation due to poor pragmatic competence. Irshad and Kiani (2022) also state that pragmatic competence of English language learners in Punjab is not satisfactory. Students at higher secondary level are not even aware of pragmatic development in English language. Asghar et al. (2024) also affirm that pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level remains under developed.

In this situation there is need for a transformative teaching method which may be supportive for the development of pragmatic competence of English language learners (Tahir, 2018). There are many teaching methods ranging from traditional grammar translation method to recent approaches in second language teaching such as communicative language teaching but in a region like Punjab where direct method or communicative approach is not appropriate because of cultural constraints, lack of required professional competence of ELT teachers and adherence to traditional teaching and learning methods, an alternative approach which may be culturally and professionally appropriate for ELT teachers and learners both is the need of time (Farooqui et al., 2024).

The term translanguaging has its origin in a Welsh word "*trawsieethu*" which refers to a pedagogic practice. Translanguaging was used for the first time by Williams (1994) to refer a pedagogic practice where bilingual students in Welsh classroom were asked to switch between languages for productive and receptive use. Translanguaging leverages full linguistics repertoire of multilingual speakers in communication process by providing them the opportunity to fluidly move between languages and dialects within a single conversation or discourse. García & Wei (2014) states that translanguaging is the process by which bilingual or multilingual speakers utilize their languages as an integrated communication system." Translanguaging allows speakers to utilize all the available linguistics resources to communicate, share their ideas and express their identity. Wei (2018) while defining translanguaging states that translanguaging also includes the deployment of various linguistics modalities such as body language, and visual aids along with spoken and written language. It means that translanguaging is not confined to mere spoken and written forms of language. It also utilizes paralinguistic features in communication process for effective and successful communication. Translanguaging according to García & Lin (2017) indicates the complexity of linguistic systems in multilingual settings with its power of creativity which multilingual speakers exhibit while navigating in the linguistics boundaries.

The effectiveness of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy for the development of various linguistic skills has been proven by different researchers. Galante (2020) found translanguaging as an effective strategy for vocabulary acquisition Similarly, P. Velasco and O García (2014) state that translanguaging enhances reading comprehension of second language learners because it allows learners to discuss and interpret the material of second language in their mother tongue or home language. Canagarajah (2015) also found translanguaging beneficial in development of writing skills of English language learners. Nursanti (2021) observes that translanguaging helps in developing oral fluency of English language learners as it reduces foreign language anxiety and fear of criticism. Translanguaging allows learners to switch between languages and dialects to maintain level of formality according to the context (Almashour, 2024). Second language learners utilize different politeness strategies by employing their cultural knowledge and linguistics skills.

Keeping in view the findings of above-mentioned studies, researcher feels the need of testing translanguaging as a strategy for developing pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab.

Literature Review

This section presents literature review relevant to this study to identify gaps and establish the basis for the present research.

The term tranaslanguaging has its origin in a Welsh word "*trawsieethu*" which refers to a pedagogic practice. Translanguaging was used for the first time by Williams (1996) to refer a pedagogic practice where bilingual students in Welsh classroom were asked to switch between languages for productive and receptive use. Williams (1996) used the term translanguaging as a reaction to the superiority of English over Welsh language as he believed that the superiority of English over Welsh was causing a linguistics inequality and injustice (Lewis et al., 2012). The superiority of English over Welsh was a risk to Welsh language which had even put Welsh language at the risk of endangered language. Translanguaging not only caused revival of Welsh language but it also had cultural and linguistic implications for English and Welsh bilingual speakers by developing a linguistic and cultural relationship between them. As a result, the bilingual speakers with fluency in both English and Welsh language became an asset as the coexistence of these two languages became a matter of linguistics proficiency and the mean of participation in distinct cultural spheres (Lewis et al., 2012).

Baker (2011) refers to translanguaging as a process in which bilingual and multilingual speakers utilize linguistics resources from diverse languages for meaning making and gaining insight and knowledge. Like Baker (2011), Lewis et al. (2012) also consider translanguaging as the use of two or more language dynamically in an integrated system. Velasco & García (2014) takes translanguaging as a fluid and versatile system in which languages are integrated by multilingual speakers to make sense of their words. In this way translanguaging does not refers to languages as separate entity. Rather translanguaging considers languages operating in a unitary system which allows users to select features of different languages in system to create meaning and gaining understanding of concepts (Otheguy et al., 2019)

García (2009) regards translanguaging as "multiple discursive practices" which enable bilinguals to gain sense of their bilingual world. By discursive practices, García (2009) means dynamic and complex set of practices which bilingual speakers utilize to think, construct and communicate meanings. The holistic view of translanguaging encompasses the ways languages are used by bilingual speakers, the interconnectedness of languages and their adaptability in complex tapestry of human communication.

The role of translanguaging in language learning context has been researched by different researchers. Baker (2011) made significant contribution in the field of bilingual education by highlighting the importance of translanguaging. Translanguaging according to Baker (2011) offers valuable insight into educational context ranging from comprehension of subject matter to development of language fluency, establishment of home - school relationship and facilitating inclusive learning environment. Translanguaging has a long-term impact on bilingual education.

In a study by Hopewell (2011), students were fully allowed to use their linguistic practices during group discussion activities. The impact of bilingualism was noted as very productive on learning. Hopewell (2011) affirms that translanguaging increases academic performance of learners as compared to separation of languages. Rather adherence to a single language in teaching and learning process can deprive learners of linguistic resources necessary for learning. This argument is consistent with Reyla (2022) that use of monolingual academic norms can lead towards academic failure of learners. Reyla (2022)

suggests the use of collaborative learning in which learners are encouraged to flexibly utilize their entire linguistic resources for comprehension of subject matter. In diverse linguistic context, students can harness power of combined linguistic resources for creating environment which may be more inclusive and effective for learning.

Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy in second language learning context is supportive for both productive and receptive skills. Translanguaging has positive impact on all the four skills i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking and helps in the acquisition of language skills (Yüzlü & Dikilitaş, 2021).

Translanguaging not only assists in developing fluency in second language, it also assists in developing confidence of second language learners which is major problem in development of fluency across all skills of second language and especially in speaking skill. Ha et al. (2021) argues that incorporating translanguaging in English language instruction results in significant and positive impact on confidence in speaking skill of learners by reducing the typical anxiety and nervousness associated with foreign or second language learning. In this study 82 percent of the participants reported that confidence level in speaking increased as a result of translanguaging. The results of this study are substantial to both ESL teachers and students because it emphasizes translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy to overcome psychological barrier which impedes second language learners' fluency especially in speaking skill of learners.

Pragmatic competence has been the subject of research in various disciplines such as linguistics, applied linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication research, and cross-cultural studies Taguchi (2011). Kasper & Rose (2002) argue that pragmatic competence in second language studies refers to the ability of second language learners to appropriately produce and comprehend utterances. Tarawneh (2023) offers a similar definition that pragmatic competence is the knowledge that guides speakers to use socially appropriate language. Pragmatic competency requires knowledge of both pragma linguistics (knowledge of speech acts) and socio-pragmatics (use of speech acts in appropriate settings).

Pragmatic competence is regarded as the most challenging aspect of language to master in learning a second language (Ninio & Snow, 2018). Therefore, the research in the field of second language pragmatics has become the area of interest for many researchers and scholars.

In the recent era, second language learning has become an important field of education. This enhanced the interest of people in second language learning with new doors opened for research in the field of second language pragmatics because like many other competencies necessary for second language learning, pragmatic competence is also central to gain mastery in second language (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). But the focus of studies in the field of interlanguage pragmatics remains mostly on second language use with its forms and function rather than on pragmatic development (Nicosia, 2017). As a result, very little area has been explored in the field of pragmatic competence development in second language.

Younas and Maqbool (2025) employed qualitative research methods in their papers. Their work helped the researcher considerably refine the methodology of this paper, even though their studies focused on the positive discourse analysis of Muslim scholars' religious speeches.

Material and Methods

The current study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative study involves non-numerical data, it follows systematic organization and interpretation to identify patterns and themes in data (Adedoyin, 2020). This process involves coding of data, developing thematic frameworks and extracting conceptual insights that highlight participants' experiences, perspectives, and contextual factors (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011).

Qualitative data in the form of ELT practitioners' interviews for in depth understanding of how translanguaging can have impact on English language learners' pragmatic competence was collected and analyzed thematically. Purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of twelve ELT teachers who had good experience and understanding of using translanguaging in ELT context which was then analyzed thematically.

Results and Discussion

Translanguaging boosts English language learners' confidence by relieving their foreign language anxiety. They feel a sense of inclusion when teachers validate their linguistics resources. Flexible use of language provides them a safe environment to actively participate in classroom discussion. This enhances their classroom participation. This active participation in classroom discussion accompanied by strategic shift on English leads towards improvement in pragmatic competence.

Sociocultural awareness is a critical component of pragmatic competence. Translanguaging enhances sociocultural awareness of English language learners. Translanguaging provides opportunity of cross-cultural comparison to English language learners. They compare differences and similarities between their native cultural norms and cultural norms associated with English culture.

Translanguaging develops a dual cultural framework providing easy navigation in both cultures i.e. their native culture and English culture. This adaptability goes beyond classroom environment while making students communicate with confidence in real life context.

Translanguaging enhances pragmatic competence of English language learners through developing critical thinking. Learners evaluate underlying principles of politeness, respect and social norms in both languages.

Translanguaging enhances learners' awareness of contextual variations and their ability to adjust their speech according to context. They recognize and respond more effectively to different contextual cues. They communicate in diverse social interactions such as professional versus casual, formal versus informal successfully.

Translanguaging enhances pragmatic competence of English language learners by developing social interaction strategies. Social interaction strategies have been reported as the key area of improvement by ELT teachers. Learners utilized their full linguistic repertoire to initiate and maintain their social interactions. ELT teachers reported that English language learners plan, test and refine their social interaction strategies in complex social interactions.

Translanguaging helps learners to develop diplomatic and contextually appropriate communication in emotionally charged interactions. They process emotions in

L1 before framing polite responses in English in emotionally complex interactions such as disagreement.

Translanguaging serves as scaffolding tool for the development of pragmatic competence of English language learners by utilizing their existing knowledge to English language for meaningful and contextually appropriate language use. This scaffolding develops sustainable pragmatic competence by providing a strong foundation of linguistics repertoire.

Parents resist translanguaging as they think that translanguaging impede the fluency and pragmatic competence in English language. They insist on English only policy because they think that English only policy may accelerate the English language learning process faster. Translanguaging can better be integrated in classroom teaching for the development of pragmatic competence with the consent of parents. ELT teachers therefore arrange meeting with parents to create awareness among them that translanguaging can accelerate the pragmatic competence.

Assessment of pragmatic competence of learners may be difficult as use of more than one language at a time can pose challenge in assessment of pragmatic competence. This issue can be addressed by assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of the final communicative act rather than evaluating how learners arrive at that performance through their multilingual resources.

Discussion

The findings from current study provides strong evidence in the favor of translanguaging as a strategy for development of pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level in Punjab.

Qualitative data which consists of ELT teachers' interviews highlights the mechanism involved in development of pragmatic competence. The understanding of this mechanism is also very important because it gives insight into the process of pragmatic development for practical implication as a result of translanguaging. ELT teachers emphasized that translanguaging plays scaffolding role in development of pragmatic competence by providing understanding of English norms, sociocultural awareness, pragmatic strategies such as politeness markers and indirect language use.

An important contribution of current study is that it provides critical insight into the way translanguaging addresses sociocultural complexity. English language learners rely heavily in their cultural norms embedded in L1. The over reliance on L1 cultural norms creates hindrance in the pragmatic development of English language learners. Many students of English language struggle in use of politeness markers, indirectness and formality due to L1 cultural norms. Translanguaging mitigates sociocultural complexity by providing a bridge for cultural comparison and adaptation (Fernández, 2024). For instance, English language learners conceptualized indirectness and formality required in request using L1 and then transferred their understanding of indirectness and formality into English language practice. It was also reported by ELT teachers that when students are provided parallel example from their L1, it develops cultural sensitivity among them and they use culturally appropriate language in real life context. These findings align with translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2015) which advocates for active negotiation of meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Translanguaging helps in developing metalinguistic awareness which is an important aspect of pragmatic competence (Ossa Parra & Proctor, 2021). Metalinguistic awareness refers to the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structural features of language, encompassing a conscious understanding of form-meaning relationships. This skill is important for language learning and literacy development, as it allows individuals to analyze and control their linguistic processing (Ke et al., 2023). The data reveals that translanguaging enabled English language learners to critically analyze and refine their language making it contextually and linguistically appropriate. ELT teachers observed that translanguaging enhanced learners' ability to produce speech acts with precision when they actively compared linguistic structure and functions in L1 and English language. This cognitive dimension of translanguaging facilitates English language learners to gain insight into structure and pragmatic norms of English language.

The current study not only highlights the benefits of translanguaging but it also gives insights into potential challenges associated with the application of translanguaging for development of pragmatic competence of English language learners and their solutions. Keeping a balance between L1 and L2 and cultural resistance those challenges which needs to be addressed for development of pragmatic competence. Translanguaging is beneficial in development of pragmatic competence when it is used strategically in classroom. Otherwise, the translanguaging may leads towards problems such as cultural resistance, classroom management, time management and over reliance on L1 which may impede pragmatic development. The current study also provides some innovative solutions to meet the challenges associated with translanguaging application classroom. Structured translanguaging zones, peer supported scaffolding and scenario based assessment are the solution suggested by current study gain benefits from translanguaging. These recommendations align with (García & Wei, 2015) view of translanguaging as a flexible and context-driven approach, emphasizing the importance of teacher agency in optimizing its use.

Conclusion

The current study analyzed the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy for the development of pragmatic competence of English language learners at higher secondary level. The findings indicate that ELT practitioners perceive translanguaging as an effective pedagogical approach for the development of pragmatic competence of English language learners. ELT teachers reported that allowing learners to utilize their entire linguistics repertoire helps them to understand and use contextually appropriate language suited to sociocultural and pragmatic norms. Many ELT teachers emphasized that many pragmatic concepts such as politeness strategies, contextual appropriateness and indirectness are easy to understand if introduced through familiar cultural and linguistic references. This indicates that ELT teachers consider translanguaging as a supportive tool for bridging gap between learners' existing knowledge and communicative demands of English.

There is also need of changing attitude towards multilingual practices in classroom. Teachers should realize that translanguaging creates inclusive environment which alleviate foreign language anxiety and develop confidence among English language learners because they consider their first language not as a deviancy but rather a supportive tool for development of pragmatic competence. Some ELT teachers even reported that translanguaging enhanced their instructional competence and interpersonal skills. Overall, translanguaging appeared to be a strong pedagogical tool to enhance pragmatic competence and supporting authentic learning in ESL classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of currents study, some recommendations are made for ELT teachers, policy makers and assessment experts of English language. It is recommended that English language teachers should actively integrate translanguaging into their classroom discourse because translanguaging naturally enhances pragmatic competence of English language learners by incorporating familiar cultural norms with English usage. They should encourage learners to use their linguistic repertoire for development of confidence, identity and reduce foreign language anxiety. For this purpose, ELT teachers should be provided pre-service and in-service training on translanguaging pedagogy to keep a balance between L1 and English, use L1 as a resource to scaffold pragmatic competence and assess pragmatic competence of English language learners in multicultural and multilingual context. Curriculum developers are recommended to revise English language syllabi by minimizing the effects of monolingual and subtractive models and shifting on additive approaches that support translanguaging practices in English language classrooms. For this purpose, policy makers should acknowledge translanguaging pedagogy that value linguistic diversity and promote equitable learning conditions. Finally, assessment experts should also devise the assessment tools that capture real-world pragmatic ability and multilingual communicative strategies, such as performance-based tasks, multilingual discourse completion tests, and pragmatic role-plays that reflect authentic language use in multilingual contexts.

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