

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Bilingualism: Impact of Mother Tongue on English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners

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Abstract



This research paper investigates Mother Tongue (Punjabi) impact on second language acquisition and the relation between bilingualism and second language acquisition. A quantitative research approach was chosen for this particular study. An online questionnaire made up of 15 items was used to collect data. All the questions asked were close-ended and distributed among almost 150 students in the city of Sialkot; 110 out of 150 responded. After analyzing data quantitatively, the research has explored the positive impact of Punjabi (mother tongue), as it positively influences the second language acquisition process. It keeps the learners involved, stretching their attention span, giving them a sense of achievement, and keeping their L1 integrity and identity intact. Moreover, this research has investigated that bilingualism enhances the process of second language acquisition. The mother tongue positively controls the process of second language acquisition as the learners can use their L1 cognition, learning experience, and worldview to facilitate and speed up the target language learning/acquisition process. There is a strong relationship between bilingualism and SLA, which must be realized and utilized by the practitioners and stakeholders involved in SLA programs worldwide.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Second Language Acquisition, Mother Tongue, English Language Learners, Target Language, SLA Programs.

Introduction & Background of the Study

Language plays a pivotal part in human life. It is a means of communicating thoughts and feelings through signs and symbols for encoding and decoding information in this global village— a multilingual place. A newborn learns his / her native language as a first language. The language to which a newborn is exposed from his / her birth is referred to as the first language. A second language is any additional language learnt or acquired (Hoque, 2017). Hence, language/s learning and acquisition is a never-ending process among humans.

Language Acquisition (LA) is a natural process without effort or conscious thought. During this procedure, the learner is unfamiliar with the syntactic structure or grammatical standards, which are absorbed and assimilated unconsciously. Its fundamental goal is to convey the information or engage in conversation with those close to the learner. On the other hand, language learning is a conscious or intentional activity. Unlike LA, where language can be acquired without systematic conscious engagement, a language learner must construct a rigorous and deliberate effort to become proficient in the language (Hussain, 2017). This fascinating feature of human life has led to the emergence of the most striking research area in social science, viz., SLA.

SLA stands for second language acquisition and has two definitions. It is a term used to pick up a second language broadly from the surroundings and through formal instructions. Moreover, it is a theory describing how humans learn a second language through a complicated and complex process. The research domain systematically investigates how individuals pick up languages other than their native language and become bilinguals and multilinguals. As a discipline in academia, the process of acquiring languages in addition to one's mother tongue is known as second language acquisition. For instance, when a youngster with Punjabi as his native language begins attending school and learning English as a second language, the English language is acquired through a second language acquisition

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process (Hoque, 2017). Researchers working in this area mainly address the modern-day need to explore and promote bilingualism in the modern globalized world where individuals, communities, societies and nations cannot afford to live in their past splendid isolation and must interact and communicate with each other for their own benefits and the benefit of humanity at large.

Bilingualism is "understanding" two languages in their most basic forms. Defining what it means to "know" a language, on the other hand, is a big challenge. While some bilinguals are fluent in both languages, others have a definite dominant or favoured language. As a result, it is critical to consider different levels of bilingualism when defining bilinguals. According to Grant & Gottardo (2008), *real* bilingualism, the ability to speak two languages fluently, is uncommon. When describing different varieties of bilingualism, it is important to consider how recently each language was learned. Dual language acquisition from birth or before one year old is considered simultaneous bilingualism. In short, studying bilingualism and bilinguals is as complex as human life.

There is no one agreed definition of individual bilingualism that is comprehensive enough to encompass all cases of people who identify themselves as "bilinguals." The spectrum can go from having near-native-level proficiency in two or more languages to having only basic conversational abilities in a second or foreign language. The former will limit the number of participants and provide a new definitional issue regarding what constitutes native-like language proficiency. Most specialists prefer the latter in the area as a starting point for developing several multilingual abilities, including biliteracy. For sociocultural bilingualism, this is accurate. Through assimilation, an individual is considered monolingual socially and politically, a bilingual linguistically and intellectually. An example of this is the case of the Kurdish language (Alemi & Daftarfard, 2010).

Language is a means by which humans express their thoughts, feelings, wants and needs. Everyone acquires the mother tongue as soon as they are born. When learning or using a second language, the learner does experience the mother tongue effect. Mother tongues can influence persons' mental processes if they express themselves in a language other than their mother tongue, such as English. While speaking English, an individual might mispronounce some words because the sound patterns of the native language have an impact. An unintentional desire of a person learning a second language is to transmit his traditions from his native tongue to the foreign language. Language interference is the term used to describe how important mother tongue influence has grown. This problem arises for almost everyone who is learning a second language. Students occasionally employ words from their first language when speaking English (Delbio, Abilasha, & Ilankumaran, 2018). It becomes imperative to understand at what points the mother tongue becomes a barrier and how it is the facilitator in learning the target language as a true means of expressing thoughts and feelings.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims at analyzing the impact of Punjabi on second language acquisition. Furthermore, the study examines the relationship between bilingualism and second language acquisition. It tends to see whether bilingualism enhances the process of acquiring a second language: if yes, how and if not, why not.

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- To explore the impact of Punjabi on English language learners in the Sialkot context.
- To investigate whether bilingualism enhances the process of second language acquisition or not.

Problem Statement

In certain cases, the impact of the mother tongue is very prominent, which causes trouble in the process of second language acquisition. However, this study aims to analyze Punjabi's effects on English language learners in the Sialkot context. The city of Sialkot presents a unique bilingual scenario because the influence of the Sialkot accent is quite prominent on the people's second and third language output, particularly in verbal expressions. The question arises if and how their mother tongue knowledge influences the process of second language acquisition.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- What is the impact of the mother tongue (Punjabi) on second language acquisition?
- How does bilingualism help speed up the process of second language acquisition?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many ways. It explores the impact of the mother tongue (Punjabi) on English language learners in Sialkot. A child starts picking up his or her parents' language as soon as s/he is born. It is quite challenging for the teacher to prevent the mother tongue's impact while helping the learners internalize the target language functions and features. They may succeed in making them learn forms and structures but not proper pronunciation, intonation, word stress patterns and sentence stress patterns due to the heavy presence of Punjabi in the Sialkot society and community. Due to the mother tongue effect, students also experience an inferiority complex. They cannot converse with the native speakers visiting Sialkot frequently for business purposes efficiently and confidently. In the classroom context also, societal norms push the learners to use only regional language; the inability to learn a target language may result from this. The infants begin to learn everything by listening to their parents in the language they speak even before birth—the influence and emphasis of regional language eclipse English language learning. Although students have been learning English academically since childhood, they can still not construct error-free sentences (Delbio, Abilasha, & Ilankumaran, 2018). So, it is important to explore Punjabi's impact on the second language acquisition process.

Literature Review

Research in Second Language Acquisition reveals that the process is much harder and more complex than first language acquisition, mainly due to the presence of a complete system of the learners' first language in their minds. Cook (2001) believes that the mental connection between L1 and L2 cannot be forsaken while studying the second language learning process. Cummins (2007) presented the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis that language transfer is not always negative, but the first language competence facilitates the second language development in learners. The hypothesis supports the idea that languages are interdependent except for a few elements that may pose difficulties in second language learning (Jessner & Cenoz, 2000). Ellis (2008) extends the idea that while learning a second language, learners build the interim rules using their L1 knowledge and first think in L1 and then translate their thoughts into the target language.

Nevertheless, many theorists believed otherwise. Krashen (1981) and Swain (1985) are the two main contributors. Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis both stress the avoidance of L1 use and maximizing the use of L2 in the second language learning process. Their hypotheses are based on the assumption that any use of L1 is detrimental to the learning speed of second language learners. The controversy on the role of mother tongue in second language acquisition has had its influence on not only the teaching approaches, methods and techniques but also the language and educational policies all around the world, including Pakistan.

A well-considered language policy explicitly defines the place for English, Urdu, Punjabi, or the appropriate native language based on the area. At which grade which language should be taught under what capacity is a decision that requires considerable thought, technical assistance, and the proper mustering of resources. Hussain, Salam & Farid (2020) very pertinently point out that most Pakistani adult learners progress in their academic life purely on intrinsic motivation. They do not get any scholarship or financial support from the government throughout their educational career except the reward they get in the form of an offer of a good job after completing their education. Thus, their motivation is entirely based on the craving for achievement, which continues throughout their life. Pakistani students face many challenges, including the unavailability of funds during their studies. They lack almost all the basic facilities, such as the small class size, motivated teachers, well-equipped classrooms, and libraries. In addition, it is crucial to handle bilingualism and language transfer as separate challenges. The primary means young people receive and express their expertise and information is through language. Our kids will not be allowed to advance far enough in the subject if we do not get the former correct (Rashid & Ahmed, 2018). However, this study aims at defining language policies. It also separates bilingualism and language transfer. However, it does not focus on explaining the relationship between bilingualism and second language acquisition. It does not explore the effects of L1 on L2 either.

The speakers who speak their mother tongue more fluently have greater social and interactional skills. More socially and emotionally resilient than other students are those who collaborate in groups and talk in their native language. The students might feel proud of themselves

and connect with their notion of identity by speaking in their mother tongue. The study of a second language does not necessarily have to be halted by the mother tongue; it can sometimes be advantageous (Bukhari & Dilshad, 2022). Although this research highlights the importance of the mother tongue in learning a second language and shows the positive impact of the mother tongue on second language acquisition, it does not focus on the overall effects of the first language on second language acquisition.

The linguistic distinction is a factor about which Punjabi speakers worry. They stay scared of mispronunciation and misinterpretation using the target language. Punjabi speakers should learn to use distinct English words rather than tonal intonations to indicate variations in a word's meaning. According to their perception, they mispronounce words rather than choosing the incorrect equivalent. The underlying reason, according to them, is that most Punjabi immigrants receive little formal education and have limited knowledge of acquiring a language. Still, language learning organizations do not consider it to take steps to improve the scenario (Sharma, 2015). This way, this study explores the obstacles for Punjabi speakers and immigrants due to their misconceptions about learning a second language but does not highlight the impact of Punjabi on English learners.

An important research topic in second language acquisition is the morpho-syntactic effect of the first language on the second language. While constructing structures in the second language, second-language learners make intense errors. The challenges faced by L2 learners have been addressed by researchers researching the area. Instructors, linguists, and experts present various strategies and methodologies and many historical periods to advance the understanding of source languages. These techniques and strategies are developed to assist L2 learners (Khan, 2020). However, this study has examined the morpho-syntactic effects of the first language on the second language yet has not stressed the impact of the mother tongue (Punjabi) on the process of second language acquisition.

Among female university students, the Punjabi language is slipping in popularity. They believe they must keep up with the modern world, and speaking Punjabi would make them appear behind the times. It is mainly due to this that people are switching from the Punjabi language to others. In addition to neglecting it, they seldom speak Punjabi as a tool for interaction and communication. Due to the misconception that Punjabi is a negative language that should not be spoken in formal or informal settings, students lack language pride in their Mother Tongue (Hafeez, Habib, & Riaz, 2021). However, this study has investigated the misconceptions of students and Punjabi people regarding their mother tongue but has not put stress on the impacts of Punjabi on English language learners.

To overcome the mother tongue's impact on the target language learning process, students must practice it without undermining their L1. It is important to avoid relying too heavily on one's mother tongue while learning English. To promote understanding of the distinctions between English and their native tongues and to consider language skills, the students can individually design critical reading tasks, back-translation, and summarizing exercises. It is a challenging task to teach English to non-native speakers. It is possible to learn a second language by utilizing some novel strategies. Using a creative approach and some entertaining ways, a teacher can cultivate the target language in students (Delbio, Abilasha, & Ilankumaran, 2018). However, this study has highlighted the ways to overcome the impacts of the target language and some important teaching strategies to teach a second language but has not explored the effects of the mother tongue on the second language.

This way, this particular study focuses on exploring the impacts of the mother tongue (Punjabi) on the process of second language acquisition and the impacts particularly affecting English language learners in the city of Sialkot.

Research Methodology

A quantitative research approach was chosen for this study as the quantitative research approach is the most systematic and accurate way of collecting data from a larger population statistically. Also, a quantitative research approach is the most preferred approach in social sciences. Moreover, it provides data in the form of pie charts, graphs, and tables through which the results can be analyzed more accurately, as, in this study, pie charts are used to interpret data.

Research Tool

To collect data, a 15-item questionnaire was prepared by the three English language teaching experts in higher education. The online questionnaire helped collect data from a larger population. As in

quantitative research, a questionnaire helps to collect data from a wider population and interpret the results more accurately. The questionnaire comprised 15 items, and all the questions asked were close-ended.

Research Sample

The questionnaire was distributed among the students of the city of Sialkot using different online platforms, i.e., WhatsApp, Instagram, and Gmail. The researchers have used cluster sampling as it is the only feasible method of selecting a sample. Cluster sampling takes less time and is more convenient. According to this sampling strategy, any location within a group with similar characteristics is chosen for data collection (Barnard, 2002). The students belong to the various educational institutions of Sialkot, such as Government College Women University Sialkot, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot, and Punjab Group of Colleges, Sialkot. However, 110 students out of almost 150 students responded to the questionnaire. The respondents in this research belong to the English department and other natural sciences and information technology disciplines. Learning a second language or English as a second language is beneficial for students taking English as their major subject. It is the basic need of everyone in this growing and updated world where English is used as an international language.

Data Analysis

Impact of Punjabi; A study of bilingualism

This study's basic purpose is to explore Punjabi's impact on English language learners in Sialkot. An online questionnaire is used to collect data for this study. Pie charts represent the results and are compared to the questionnaire items to provide further interpretation. The impact of Punjabi is explored through the questionnaire, and interpretations obtained through the questionnaire represent what sort of impact the use of the Punjabi language or mother tongue has on the process of second language acquisition.

What is your age?

109 responses

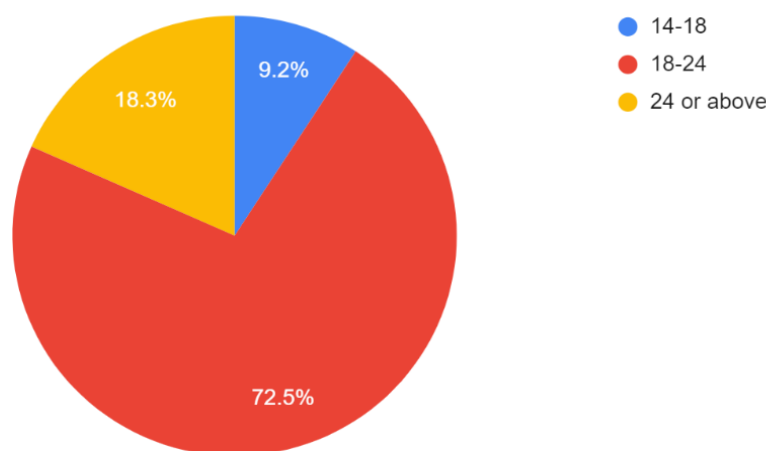


Figure 1: Age

Figure 1 shows that most of the students, 72.5%, are young adults who fall between the ages of 18-24. Furthermore, all of them belong to the city of Sialkot. It was important to capture the age group to determine the youth's growing trend and language attitude. 18-24 years is the age group that strives hard to learn the target language (English) and feel the positive or negative impact of their L1 in the process of learning/acquisition. It can be inferred that the older people in the city do not need to learn English as they have learnt it already, or they do not need it to stay successful in the field.

Which language do you use at home?

110 responses

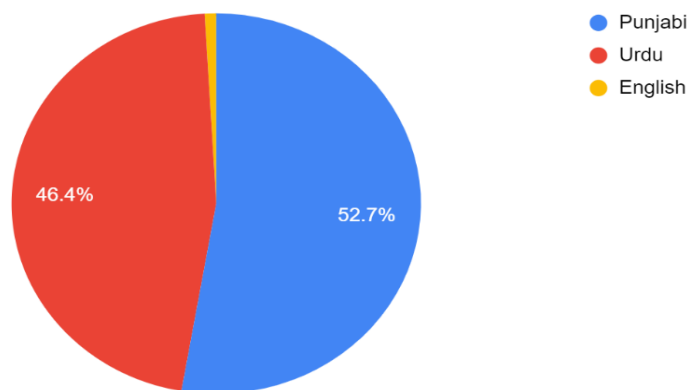


Figure 2: Usage of Language at Home

Figure 2 demonstrates that the most spoken language at home, 52.7% in the city of Sialkot, is Punjabi, and after Punjabi, the other commonly used language at home, 46.4% is Urdu. In the city of Sialkot, English is a negligible and rarely used language. Thus there is no social support for SLA in Sialkot, unlike some other parts of the country. It presents the city as the SLA context heavily surrounded by L1. Resultantly, English language learners coming to educational institutes enter the language classrooms with heavy L1 baggage.

What is your mother tongue?

110 responses

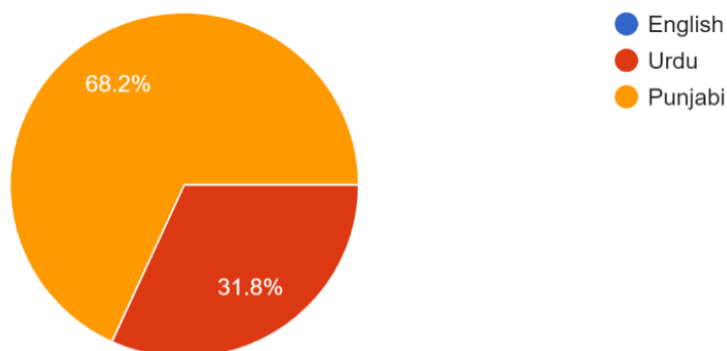


Figure 3: Mother Tongue

Figure 3 depicts that the mother tongue of most of the Sialkot people, 68.2% is Punjabi. Moreover, 31.8% of people use Urdu as their Language1. Furthermore, no one uses English as a mother tongue or L1 in the city of Sialkot. In a way, the English language status in Sialkot is more of EFL rather than ESL, contrary to the contexts and scenarios in other parts of the country where it is mainly ESL.

How long have you been speaking Punjabi?

108 responses

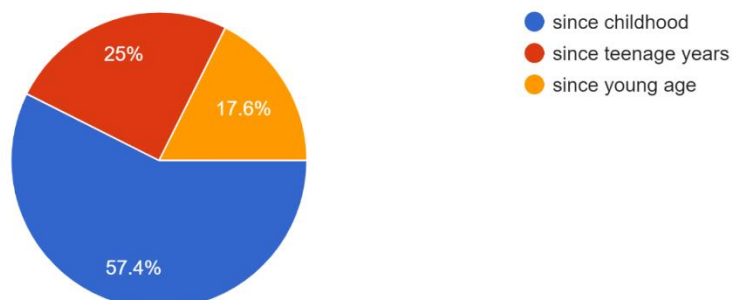


Figure 4: Age to Begin Punjabi Speaking

Figure 4 indicates that more than half the population of the city of Sialkot, 57.4%, has been utilizing the Punjabi language since childhood. Other 25% begin speaking Punjabi in their teenage years, and the remaining 17.6% start using the Punjabi language from a young age. In short, the roots of the regional language (Punjabi) are much stronger in the city than in other cities of Pakistan.

Which language do you speak with your parents?

110 responses

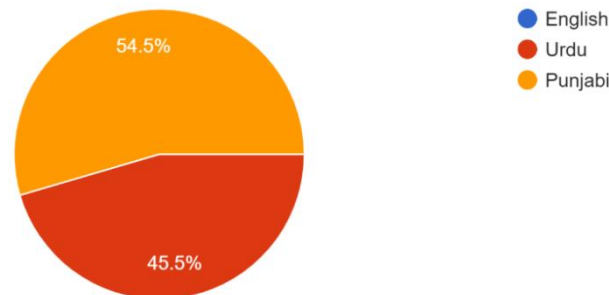


Figure 5: Language Spoken with Parents

Figure 5 depicts that English is the least spoken language by parents and even at homes in the city of Sialkot. Most Sialkoti people use Punjabi 54.5% and Urdu 45.5% with their parents. Thus, despite being an industrial city, the sense of belonging to the regional and national languages is stronger in this city.

Which language do you speak when you're among your friends?

110 responses

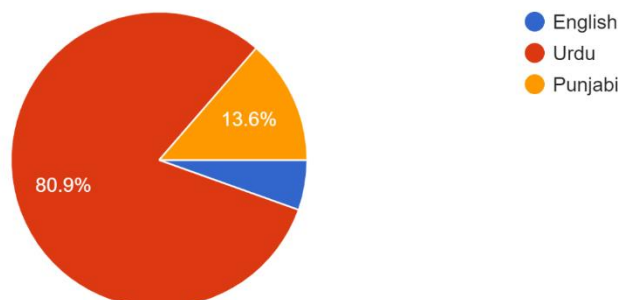


Figure 6: Language used Among Friends

The above chart (figure 6) explains that English is rarely used in Sialkot. Sialkot people do not bother to use English even when they are among their friends. However, they prefer to use the Urdu language in their friend circle, as the above pie chart shows the number of Urdu-speaking people among friends at 80.9%. Here, in the case of the language spoken among friends in the city of Sialkot, Punjabi is also not so common; according to the above figure, it stands at 13.6%. It indicates the growing distance of the young generation from their mother tongue, which may lead them to feel the need to learn English as the lingua franca required to survive in the international job market.

Are you proficient enough in your mother tongue?

110 responses

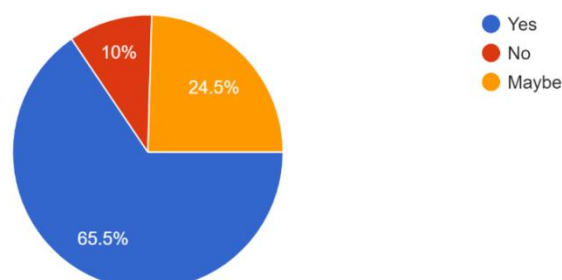


Figure 7: Mother Tongue Proficiency

According to figure 7, the proficiency rate of Sialkot people in their mother tongue is high at 65.5%. In the city of Sialkot, due to language shift and lack of practising mother tongue at home, the remaining population is not proficient enough in the mother tongue.

Which kind of impacts your mother tongue have on second language acquisition?

110 responses

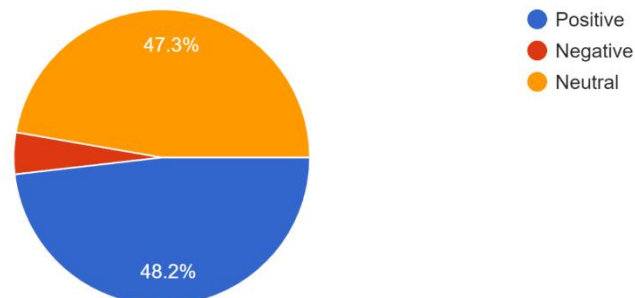


Figure 8: Mother Tongue Impact on SLA

Figure 8 demonstrates that the mother tongue does not negatively impact the process of learning any second language, no matter which language a learner is learning during the process of second language acquisition. However, the mother tongue's impact on the people of the city of Sialkot is mostly positive and neutral. The ratio is 48.2% and 47.3%, respectively, highlighting it vividly.

Second language acquisition is hindered by your mother tongue or not?

109 responses

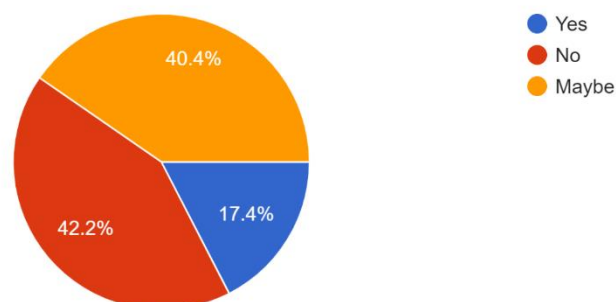


Figure 9: Mother Tongue Interference in the Process of SLA

The findings have shown that the mother tongue positively influences the process of second language acquisition. As per figure 9 above, a very small population, 17.4% of the city of Sialkot, thinks that the mother tongue (Punjabi) hinders the process of second language acquisition.

Language shift enhance the process of second language acquisition?

108 responses

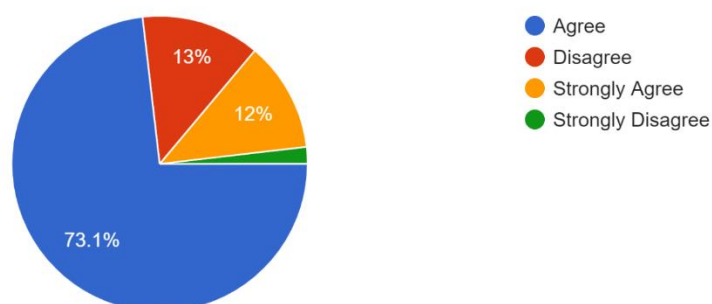


Figure 10: Language shift and SLA

The results indicate that majority of the Sialkot people, 73.1%, agreed with the point that the process of second language acquisition is enhanced through language shift. By shifting the language from one

to another (L1 to L2), we can build a strong vocabulary bank that helps us learn a second language later. Only a few people, 13%, are not in favour of shifting their mother tongue/language.

Do you fully understand your mother tongue?

109 responses

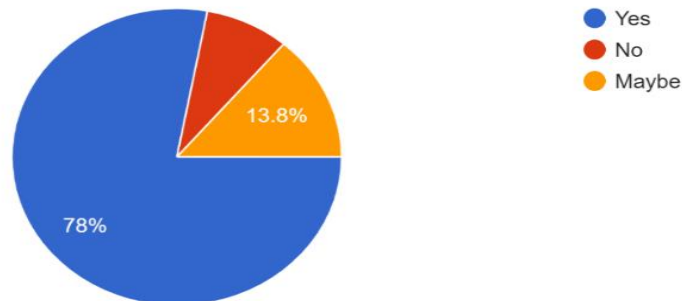


Figure 11: Understanding of Mother Tongue

As per the above pie chart, 78% of the Sialkot population claims to fully understand their mother tongue, although, in recent times, most of them are shifting their language to English; also, their education system has turned up to another language (English). Only 13.8% of the population does not claim to fully understand the mother tongue, which may be because of their social setup and family background.

What should be the medium of instruction to fulfill educational objectives?

109 responses

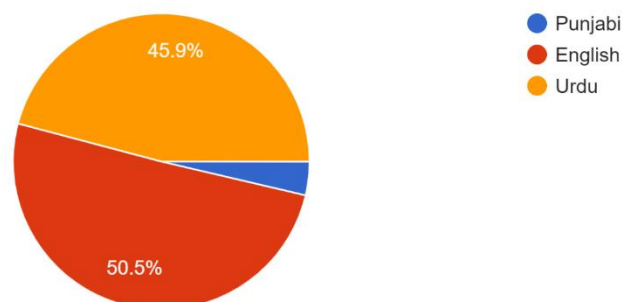


Figure 12: Medium of instruction in the education system

Figure 12 demonstrates that most people in Sialkot do not favour using their mother tongue (Punjabi) in educational institutions. Nevertheless, half of the population, 50.5%, prefer to utilize English in their educational settings, and the other 45.9% favour using Urdu to fulfil their educational objectives.

Being Bilingual enhance the process of second language acquisition.

109 responses

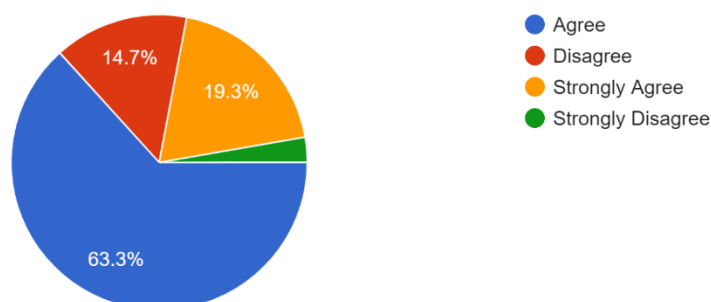


Figure 13: Bilingualism and SLA

The relationship between bilingualism and SLA cannot be neglected; the fields of bilingualism and SLA have been going side by side for a long ago. Like this, most of the people of the city of Sialkot,

63.3%, agreed, and 19.3% strongly agreed that bilingualism enhances the process of learning a second language. Merely 19.3% of the population does not agree with the point that bilingualism enhances the process of second language acquisition.

What should be the language of social media?

108 responses

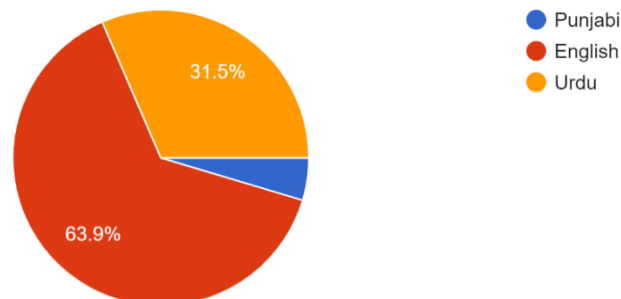


Figure 14: Language of social media

The major population, 63.9% of the city of Sialkot, is in favour of using English as the language of social media as it is a basic need of the hour in the recent and updated world and the worldwide language. The remaining 31.5% population is in the vision of using Urdu as the language of social media; they might want to keep their national language alive.

Females are more comfortable with their mother tongue.

109 responses

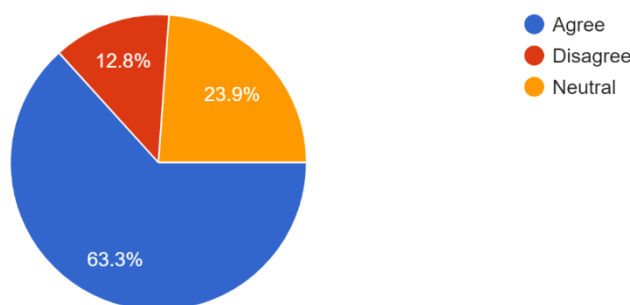


Figure 15: Mother Tongue and Females

Figure 15 shows the results contrary to a general perception that the majority of females, 63.3% of city Sialkot, have no problem speaking their mother tongue and feel comfortable with it. The other 23.9% population is also neutral. Only just 12.8% of the Sialkot population thinks that females are not comfortable with their mother tongue; they might have a fear of face-saving. This result is quite contrary to the female trends in the country's big cities and establishes Sialkot as a city with a traditional stance on the use of languages.

Research Findings

After analyzing data quantitatively, this research has come up with the following results:

1. Most respondents positively take the mother tongue as influencing the process of second language acquisition. Teachers in the class must realize that imposing a complete ban on the use of L1 on English as Foreign or Second Language learners can have psychological repercussions. It may push the shy and weak ones into their isolated cocoons forever and take Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety to uncontrollable heights (Albashar, Hussain & Farid 2018). In figure 9, the results have clearly shown that a very small population of 17.4% of the city of Sialkot thinks that Punjabi (mother tongue) hinders the process of second language acquisition and has negative impacts on acquiring a second language. Similarly, figure 8 results show that the effects of the mother tongue on the people of the city of Sialkot are mostly positive and neutral, as the ratio is 48.2% and 47.3%, respectively. The finding of the study, like the one conducted by Ahmad, Radzuan, & Hussain (2018), favours a well-planned

use of the mother tongue. However, they argue that extensive use of the mother tongue is counter-productive to both teaching and learning the target language.

2. The research has explored that the relationship between bilingualism and SLA cannot be neglected; the fields of bilingualism and SLA have been going side by side for a long ago. As in figure 13, the results indicated that of most of the people of the city of Sialkot, 63.3% agreed and 19.3% strongly agreed that bilingualism enhances the process of acquiring a second language. Merely 19.3% of the population does not agree with the point that bilingualism enhances the process of second language acquisition. This finding is supported by the research by Albashar, Hussain & Farid (2018), which recommends that L1 of the learner can be used occasionally and judiciously to speed up the language learning process naturally.

Conclusion

The use of the first language in teaching and learning the target language has been the major debate in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) over the years (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Machaal, 2012; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). This research has explored the impact of Punjabi on the process of second language acquisition. It has established the relationship between bilingualism and second language acquisition. It has also tried to determine whether bilingualism enhances the process and abilities to acquire a second language. Furthermore, this research was done on the people of the city of Sialkot who are learning English through the process of second language acquisition (SLA).

This way, after collecting the data through a questionnaire and analyzing it quantitatively, this research has safely concluded that the impact of Punjabi (mother tongue) is positive and influences the process of second language acquisition in a pleasant way. This is in line with what Albashar, Hussain & Farid (2018) state that academic proficiency obtained through the mixed medium of instruction promotes and facilitates the acquisition/learning of English because it helps to make listening and reading inputs more comprehensible by making the learners extrinsically motivated. This research has concluded that bilingualism enhances the process of second language acquisition; it goes side by side with SLA.

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