MOTHER TONGUE: A BOON OF BANE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Often, in the second language classrooms, little or no attention is given by the teacher or curriculum (including the Educational system) to the identity of the student. A student enters the classroom with his own identity and culture. When acquiring a second language, it is necessary for the student to absorb the culture of the second language, too (Spackman, 2009, p.2). This is where the issue of culture and identity influencing second language acquisition occurs. In general, students represent the identity and culture of their first language and where they come from. The purpose of this study is to examine the influences of culture and identity in reference to the first language or the mother tongue of the learner on second language.

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim in learning a second language is generally to achieve a reasonable amount of flexibility and linguistic creativity in the target language. The criterion of success of a second language teacher depends on whether the students can construct new utterances in the language independently or not. It follows that the principal task in the learning of second language is mastering the finite system by which linguistic creativity is achieved. Language is organized to meet the communicative and linguistic demands of the learners. Language contains a system of symbols which can be referred to as entities in the physical world to express more abstract concepts. The application of grammatical rules in the actual process of communication depends on the setting in which the communication takes place and the purpose of the users. Thus the speaker's choice of linguistic forms is consistently influenced by these factors. SLA lays emphasis on learning the second language through natural environment, similar to that of the first language. But it is not easy to execute SLA as it leads to many difficulties for the students and causes errors in production. SLA is influenced by

some external factors like social conditions, educational background, teaching methods, available facilities; and internal factors like cognitive mechanism which enables the students to extract information from the input they get. Before learning the second language the learners are already grounded in their mother tongue, so their cognitive mechanism works in a better way. Thus by comparing, generalizing, translating and transferring rules of their mother tongue they cannot attain native-like competence because both the languages are different and so is the social setting.

It is expected from the learner to respond productively just as the child does when he is exposed to his mother tongue with imitative responses. But it is a fact that such imitative responses are not enough to ensure language learning. Imitation ensures that the sentences uttered are correctly formed at the initial stage of learning. But it fails to meet several other conditions that are necessary for language learning. In the beginning repetitions are acceptable but gradually they have to be taken on to some more independent activities. Using a language is as much a matter of making choices from the grammatical system as of knowing by which forms these choices are realized. As long as the learner is imitating, nothing is being learned about how the choices of language form are made. For this the learner himself is to be put into the condition which can lead to learning by making errors and mistakes. But proper feedback of these mistakes can ensure formation of correct sentences. By regulating these rules one can combine different units of language and produce infinite number of sentences. This kind of knowledge is not necessarily conscious knowledge of language but linguistic intuition about correct and incorrect sentences. Although there is no surety that this kind of intuition will also ensure appropriateness of form which is a part of sociolinguistics where the structurally correct sentences are evaluated in a "social vacuum."

So the situational use of language is of vital importance. The "acquired system" or "acquisition" is the product of the subconscious process very similar to that in which children acquire their first language. In this subconscious effort the students indulge in comparing their mother tongue with the second language. But acquisition of L2 is different from that of L1; because a person learns the latter due to constant exposure to it. On the contrary just because the amount of exposure in the second language is less, it causes mother-tongue interference. In this way, cognitive process in learning and acquiring the second language and the influence of sociolinguistic factors especially the influence of mother-tongue forms a crucial area of this research.

Mother-tongue is the inseparable part of the cultural identity of a learner. While acquiring the second language s/ he tries to have his or her own analogy and observations rather than the instructions or rules etc. Present time is the time when everyone is concerned to learn English because it has become a global need. In India also its importance is recognized. But the

question that arises while acquiring the Second language is about the role of the first language or the mother tongue i.e. Hindi. The question is whether Mother tongue is a hindrance or an aid in SLA.

Mother-tongue seems a hindrance in English when it comes to mother tongue interference at phonological, lexical and grammatical level. To a considerable extent this seems to be true because we learn those aspects easily which are there in our first language like adding suffix to make plural. But if these generalizations are taken further they lead the learners to erroneous constructions, because they do not match with their first language and lead on to constructions like: "Does she likes flowers?", "She is very proudy." etc

But mother-tongue also proves an aid where there is similarity between the first and second language. For example in Hindi and English we have /I/ and /I:/ sounds that are easy for the learner to pronounce but diphthongs and pure vowels like /Ə/,/Ə:/ and consonant sounds like /ɜ/, /θ/ etc are not easy to learn as these do not correspond with Hindi sounds. Similarly the assertive sentences in past simple tense are easy to produce as we add a stem -ed in English and a bar (matra) in Hindi

'He sneez**ed**' can be produced easily in Hindi as *Voh chiink**aa**.*

The Indian learners can easily understand and learn such words which have similar usage in English like

HINDI	ENGLISH
aanaa, jaanaa	come, go
yahaan, vahaan	here, there
SIMPLE ENDPOINT *pahunchnaa- ko, tak*	reach- to, till
SIMPLE SOURCE POINT *chodnaa, prasthaan karnaa*	leave, depart- from
COMPLEX ENDPOINT *ghusnaa- mein* *mein se, se baahar*	enter- in in from, from out
POTENTIAL ENDPOINT	near, advance

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samiip aanaa, badhnaa kii or	towards
BOUNDARY/ ELONGATION Paar karna, kaatnaa Ke paar	cross over, cut across across

But as pointed earlier if the two languages are very different then it becomes difficult to learn the second language and as mentioned earlier, it leads to mother- tongue interference. This is so because the learners try to bank upon his mother-tongue for support. Most of the time, they generalize the facts of mother-tongue in second language acquisition which causes errors in the use of English. For example they add the plural suffixes of Hindi with English words and use *bookein, callein, tablein* instead of "books", "calls" and "tables". Hindi differs from English in terms of alphabet, phonology and syntax.

Firstly if we talk about the alphabet system, the Devangari script employed by Hindi contains both vowels (10) and consonants (40) and is characterized by bars (matras) along with the symbols and these bars are the symbols for certain vowel sounds. Hindi is a syllable-based language in which every syllable is prominently pronounced. So the pronunciation of new words can be reliably predicted from their written form. This is in strong contrast to English which is a stressed-time language. This is the reason why second language users mispronounce English words because they are unfamiliar with the two language systems and apply the logic of Hindi trying to forcibly pronounce every syllable.

Secondly if we talk about phonology, in comparison to English, Hindi has approximately half as many vowels and twice as many consonants. This leads to several problems in pronunciation. One difficulty is distinguishing phonemes in words such as "said/sad;" "power/paw;" "vet/wet," etc. Words containing the letters "th" (**th**is, **th**ing, mon**th**s) will pose the same kind of problems for any second language learner of English. The phoneme /ʒ/ as exemplified by the letter "s" in "pleasure" is unavailable in Hindi and so pronunciation of such words is difficult. Consonant clusters at the beginning or end of words are more common in English than Hindi. This leads to errors in pronunciation of words such as "straight" (*is-traight*), "fly" (*fa-lie*), "film" (*fi-lam*).

Compared to English, Hindi has weak but predictable word stress. Learners therefore have considerable difficulty with the irregular stress patterns of words such as "photograph" and "photography." Hindi learners are not in the habit of using unstressed and stressed syllables in polysyllabic words such as "tomorrow," "intelligent," "remember" etc., and will often try to stress on structured words like "has," "and," "was," "to" etc.

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Thirdly to talk about syntax especially verb/tense; Hindi has some aspects of tenses similar to those used in English like continuous, simple, perfect but not perfect continuous that is why Indian learners use a sentence like-"It is raining for two hours", instead of saying – "It has been raining for two hours." This leads to the very common overuse of the present continuous by Hindi learners when in English the present simple is required:

"We are understanding this point."
"I am having a small family."
 "I am not knowing the answer."

Since Hindi does not have auxiliaries, learners are prone to asking questions by means of intonation alone:

"She has a brother?"

and make mistakes such as:

"When you got married?" Or "She not eat meat?"

In Hindi the future tense is required in the dependent clause of open condition. This leads to interference mistakes such as:

"If you will help me, I will help you."

Hindi typically uses a subjunctive in polite requests, which have the word order of statements rather than questions. Interference results in problematic requests such as:

"You will tell me the time please?" or "You may lend me your dictionary?"

There is no definite article in Hindi, and number "one" is commonly used whereas in English the indefinite article is required before nouns. As expected, these differences make it difficult for Hindi learners to get the articles correct in English.

Even the word order in a sentence is different in Hindi and English. In an affirmative sentence in Hindi, the verb comes as the last element in an affirmative sentence as – SOV, SOAV etc. while in English the verb comes immediately after the subject as SVO, SVOC, SVOCA etc. as :-

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Hum Hindi bolte hain. (Hindi)
  S   O   V
We speak Hindi. (English)
  S   V   O

Secondly, in Hindi the preposition is in "postpositive" position so Hindi native-speakers have problems with the correct choice of the English preposition itself and the learners may make mistakes because of the influence of mother-tongue in the use of prepositions . The possibility is that the Indian learner will write or say: "It is ten o' clock in my watch."
The learner uses "in" instead of "by" because in Hindi it is

Meri ghadi <u>mein</u> dus baje hain.

Mistakes such as: "They were sitting on (at) the table," are typical.

In terms of vocabulary, Hindi has incorporated numerous English words like "cooler," "computer," "A.C.," "copy," "Photostat," "photo," "college," "platform," "license," "passport," "visa," "pen," "pencil," etc., which is a help to the beginner who wants to acquire English vocabulary. However, the pronunciation of many of the loan words has changed in Hindi. Some of the changes observed are as follows:

RP	ESL USERS
/kɒlɪdʒ/	/kɒleIdʒ/
/plætfɔm/	/pleItfɔm/
/fəʊtəstæt/	/fəʊtəsteIt/
/laIsns/	/laIsens/
/sɒri/	/sɔ:ri/
/fɔ:mæt/	/fɔ:meI t/

Thus mother-tongue interference in SLA poses a major hurdle. Another significant fact is that mother-tongue is acquired through environment; second language is learnt through conscious effort but the desired environment is completely missing. But at the same time it cannot be denied that the mother tongue is not always a hurdle. Many times, when the teacher fails to make the students speak out in English because of hesitation, only Hindi proves to be the source of encouragement for him in the class, because the mother tongue provides the learner the sense of belongingness, his cultural identity, and the level of comfort ability.

After conducting the interviews of English language teachers in Rajasthan, I was brought to the conclusion that mother tongue i.e. Hindi proves both a hindrance and aid in the second

language classroom. In Indian scene where maximum students come from the Hindi medium background, exclusively direct method cannot work there but the bilingual method proves more helpful.

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