

Multilingualism in Education: Analyzing Literacy Practices in Schools

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Abstract

In multilingual communities, the literacy and linguistic practices in education represent the broader social and cultural context. The interaction between students and teachers and the interaction between peers pictures the literacy practices outside the classrooms and schools as well. This study takes into account the literacy practices of young learners inside and outside their classrooms. It studies the informal interactions between students and teachers inside the classrooms as well as the interaction between teachers and students outside the classrooms. Data is collected through classrooms observation from three different social strata of the society. 2 schools are selected from each strata so, in total 6 schools are the part of this study. The current study caters only to the informal linguistic and literacy practices between teachers and students inside and outside the classrooms. The data is categorized, and the results are deduced. The collected data reveals the conscious as well as unconscious efforts on parts of the teachers to interact in the desired language with the students. The multilingual literacy practices reveals that social class also has a major affect on the interaction between the teachers and the students. The social identity also affects the linguistic identity of the individuals. This causes the students to talk to their instructors in the preferred language even in the informal scenarios.

Keywords: Literacy Practices, Multilingualism, Classrooms, linguistic choices

1. Introduction

The literacy practices of the people in a society are carried out by the utilization of numeracy and multilingual discourse. These literacy practices are learned and practiced by the children in schools and at homes. These practices are influenced by their teachers as well as parents. Though Pakistan is a multilingual community still the role of regional languages in

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the field of education has not been acknowledged. The policy on the matter of medium of interaction is also silent. In the educational institutions the interaction between the instructors and the students is both formal and informal during the whole day. The interaction also takes place inside as well as outside the classroom. These multilingual literacy practices in the schools reflect the larger multilingual community of the country.

2. Literature Review

Literacy practices are internal processes of an individual and simultaneously they are also the social practices that are related to the individuals. Barton & Hamilton (2000) talk about them as “In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (p.7). In this way literacy practices require a situation, and they are influenced by the social fabric of the society. They are the patterns that are seen in communities as Barton & Hamilton (2000) argue that literacy practices can be understood “as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals” (p.8).

Hawkins (2004) believes that as language cannot simply be recognized as the ability to operate vocabulary items in correct grammatical structures, in the same way literacy is not simply the ability to encode and decode print. Literacy makes use of the various modes of text in a vast local or global context making meaning within situated social practices. Literacy practices make use of cultural and social knowledge to make meaning in broader social context. Kumar & Singh (2014) talk about multilingualism and claim “Multilingualism can be described as the application of more than one language by an individual in their communication for multifarious roles” (p.1). In other words, the utilization of various languages is linked with the fulfillment of a variety of roles in the society. Kumar & Singh (2014) are of the view that for the transmission of knowledge, thought, and ideas to the learners for education, communication is vital. This according to Kumar & Singh (2014) establishes the fact that

only use of single language for communication in educational process cannot be successful to the learner and the source and bilingual and multilingual environment is spread at different level of education system. Thus multilingual skill is necessary for the learner as well as the source or the teacher.

(p.1)

So, it is emphasized that in a bilingual atmosphere, the necessity of understanding more than one language is essential for the student as well as

the instructor in order to work appropriately. It can be said that in a multilingual community knowing more than one language becomes a requirement. In multilingual contexts, the multilingual literacy practices are employed by the individuals to work properly. These literacy practices are also developed in order to satisfy numerous social responsibilities. Homes as well as educational institutions help in the development of these multilingual literacy practices. It can be claimed that the language and the culture of a community in which that language is spoken are in a close relationship as Sirbu (2015) says “They are inextricably related, so that one cannot understand or appreciate the one without a good knowledge of the other” (p.406). This connection between the culture and language can also be noticed in the classrooms as they are also a component of the bigger culture and portray the practices that take place in the larger social context. So, the classrooms are an example of the society as they operate similar to the wider society. The multilingual literacy practices that are being depicted and performed in the classrooms represent the multilingual literacy practices of the larger society in general.

For the purpose of meaning making observing the phenomenon of multimodality starts the debate that the spoken is only one of many modalities and that this modality has been advantaged in the training of literacy. The procedures of the production of text and desktop computers have made it easy for the teachers to combine images, movement, sound, spatiality, and signal. The production of these texts for the purpose of multiliteracies and multilingual literacies has broadened the scope of teaching and learning. Billings & Gomez (2001) claim

“Today teachers walk into urban classrooms with children who represent an incredible range of diversity. Not only are there students of different races and ethnicities but there are students whose parents are incarcerated or drug-addicted, whose parents have never held a steady job, whose parents are themselves children (at least chronologically), and who are bounced from one foster home to the next. And there are children who have no homes or parents”.

(p. 14)

Since classrooms represent the larger community, they also practice the practices that take place in the larger communities. The processes and prejudices that exist in the society are all portrayed in the classrooms. Blot & Collins (2003) assert “Recognizing the interrelatedness of text, power and identity is unavoidable when one turns to investigate the relation of colonizer to colonized. Colonial encounters, from their inception, were

marked by a clash of unequal powers engaged in struggle.” (p.121) and so in colonized societies, classrooms also depict the colonial mindsets and colonized concepts.

In Pakistan the educational policies, since the creation of the country, are silent about the medium of instruction in the educational institutions. Though Urdu has been declared as the national and English an official language of the country still it leaves a lot of space for the inclusion of regional languages in the field of education. Since the presence of regional languages has not been acknowledged so the discourse of education revolves around only two languages and those are English and Urdu as Siddiqui (2016) asserts that the makers of the education policy in Pakistan confronted the subject of language and its part in education. Rahman (1999) describes that the cardinal point of the first educational conference 1947 was to make Urdu the lingua franca of Pakistan.

Rahman (1999) further asserts “Urdu was given so important a place for political and psychological reasons” (p.67). There is a political reason for this and the explanation is that Pakistan was a multilingual community and the governing leaders of the state used Islam and Urdu as a method to unite the population. The purpose of doing this was to create the national identity as Pakistani and to lessen the risk of ethnic identities to deteriorate or disintegrate the state. Rahman (1999) discusses the similar issue and states that “the choice of medium of instruction, an aspect of status planning, is a political matter” (p.88). Since Pakistan as part of the subcontinent was ruled by British before independence so, English was looked upto as the language of the educated and the elite. Where Hindi was associated with the ideology of Hindus, there Urdu represented the identity of the Muslims who were struggling for Pakistan. Siddiqui (2016) states that language remained a contested issue even after the independence of the country, giving birth to various questions of choosing a state language, status of English language, use of the regional languages and medium of instruction.

3. Materials and Methods

The current research takes into account the multilingual literacy practices of the young learners in the Pakistani schools. The study deals with literacy as a social practice being observed in the Pakistani schools and it investigates how these literacy practices are embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices. Data (literacy practices) is collected from real

social life i.e classrooms. The data is collected by non participant observation from the classrooms. The tool for data collection is observation. Observations are done at three different identified social strata of the schools in Rawalpindi city. 2 schools are selected from each identified social stratum. Thus the categories are

1st Identified Social Stratum: Fee below 2500 rupees per month approx.

2nd Identified Social Stratum: Fee rupees 6000 & above per month approx.

The practices at school include both, the activities and practices of learners inside the classroom and outside the classroom. This includes

- Games that are played inside and outside the class
- Student-teacher interaction inside and outside the class

The theoretical framework to provide the underpinnings for the current study is Barton & Hamilton's (1998), (2000), (2005) theory of literacy as social practice. The theory outlines six propositions about the nature of literacy

1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.
4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
5. Literacy is historically situated.
6. Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (p. 8)

By adapting the theoretical framework, the collected data is divided into the following category.

Category A: Informal Interaction Between Teachers and Students Inside the class

Category B: Informal Interaction between Teachers and Students Outside the class

3.1 Transcription Key

Since no standard symbols are available for the transcription of Urdu data, mainly Kuchru, (1978) has been followed, however, due to the disparities of Urdu and Hindi pronunciation it was modified to suit the needs

of the present research. Following points should be kept in mind while going through the transcription.

- i. All the Urdu words are italicized in the text to distinguish them from English words. So, for instance 'is' refers to the English auxiliary, while *is* in the italicized form refers to the Urdu equivalent of 'this'. In the same way the word *pass* in *pass jana hai*, is not the English word pass, rather it is the transcribed form of Urdu equivalent of near. But if it is written as pass it is English verb.
- ii. Similarly 'say' is English verb whereas *say* is Urdu preposition. In the same way key is a noun in English but *key* in Urdu *key note book* is Urdu preposition showing the possessives.
- iii. The text has certain words that have the same pronunciation in both the languages such as chocolate, pencil, class, board. They are not italicized in the text. Though the Urdu equivalent of the word black board exists but it is not used in the everyday conversation so board is also included in the list of words that are pronounced in the same way in both the languages because board is also written as board in the everyday written text instead of its Urdu equivalent due to the globalization.
- iv. Spellings are written as c-l-a-w-s with a hyphen to separate each alphabet as the students pronounce each alphabet separately after the teacher.
- v. Proper nouns such as the names of the people are not italicized in the text. So, the names of the students even though they occur in between the Urdu text are not italicized. For example the names of the students like Manahil, Easa, Moiz, Taha, Amna, Hamza, Khubaib, Abdullah, Saad, Talal, Mustafa etc are not italicized in the text.
- vi. The Arabic script is transcribed in the same way as the Urdu text is transcribed in the data. The Arabic script is not transcribed in the Arabic way of transcribing the text instead it is written in Roman Urdu. The Arabic text is also italicized in the data.

4. Discussion

4.1 Category A: Informal Interaction between Teachers and Students Inside the class

In all the three identified social strata the informal interaction between students and teachers inside the class took place.

a) First Identified Social Stratum

In the first identified social stratum there was very little teacher student informal interaction inside the class since teachers and students do not share much about each other. Moreover the students were not friendly with the teachers. However there are few instances of this interaction. As the rest of the students have completed their work and waiting for their break time few of the students were still working on their worksheets so the teacher talked to them.

Teacher: *Chalein jaldi finish karen. Jo finish karay ga wo bahar jaey ga.*

Ap nai jana hai na bahar.

Student: *Ji, kr liya hai khatam.*

The above mentioned interaction took place in Urdu language with the word finish as the only code mixed element in the Urdu sentence. The student has replied the teacher *Ji* which is a formal reply in the Urdu language to someone elder in the society. The *na* used in the exchange has made it an informal interaction.

Another student teacher verbal exchange took place in the following way as she says:

Student: *Mein ne na raat ko khawab dykha tha.*

Teacher: *Khawab dykha tha?*

Student: *Phir mujhy neend nae aai.*

Teacher: *Tu mama k pass jana tha.*

Student: *Mujhay bhai saudia lay k jar ha tha motor cycle pay.*

Teacher: *Aapi ko nae sunaya ye khawab?*

Student: *Aapi soi hui thi.*

The above mentioned exchange of informal information took place in the Urdu language with no code mixed elements. The teacher and the students converse easily in the Urdu language with no code mixing.

In the following example the teacher talks about the weather outside and the students joined in to talk about the weather as well.

Teacher: *Aj tou bahar rain ho rhi hai, kitna piyara mosam hai na.*

Student: *Mama kehti hein barish ho rahi hai, chatri hai. Meray pass hai chatri, Esha k pass choti si chatri hai.*

Teacher: *Jannat ap itni baatein krti hein subha subha. Ghar me b itni baatein krti hein?*

In the example mentioned above the teacher has deliberately used the word rain in order to tell the students that they have to call it rain and not its Urdu equivalent word. That is the way students remember and use the vocabulary items that the teachers want them to. The interaction is in the Urdu language with rain as the only code mixed word of the English language into the sentence of Urdu language.

b) Second Identified Social Stratum

The informal interaction between teachers and students in the second identified social stratum took place in quiet detail. Teachers and students talk to each other in greater frequency as compared to the first identified social stratum. This is evident in the following examples.

Teacher: Who is wearing warm clothes from inside? Who is wearing a high neck?

Students: Ma'am I am wearing. Ma'am I am wearing.

Teacher: Who is wearing color jackets? One, two, three. O no, Ma'am Subrina is going to cut your marks now. She will say there are 4 students who are not wearing proper uniform. Ma'am *kahen gi ye tu in k marks katnay chaheay hein*. Do you want a golden star for your class?

Students: Yes. (collectively)

Teacher: *Agar hamari class ko golden star milay ga* then other teachers will come and see and they'll say wow they are so good. They are wearing proper uniforms. They are not crying, they have good mood. Show me your smiley faces.

The students made the smiley faces.

Teacher: Good. I saw it in the camera *ghar ja k kuch bachoun nai uniform utar k aasy throw kiya tha aur unhoun nai garm kaprey b nahi pehnay*. Why didn't you wear the warm clothes? *Kuch bachoun nai sweaters q nae pehnay?* Mamas *ko tung kr rhy thay*. Ummmm I don't want to wear *me nai nae pehn'na*. I could see. *Thoray thoray bachay hein, me oun ka naam nae loun gi* but after going home you are not going to say that. *Ap nai garam kapray pehn'ny hein*. Ayesha *apki shakal sai mgy nazar aa rha hai*, you said that? Hain na? *Ap nai ghar ja k sweater utar di thi na, socks b utar di thi?* You know how cold it is? *Abi ap log sub bemar huay thay* last month. Hain na? *subko khansi hui thi*. You will again fall sick. *Jb ap bemar houn gay tu galay me dard hogi*. Achi *baat tu nae hai na? jb bachae bemar ho jain to khela b nahi jata* that's so boring, *kitna boring ho jata hai, maza b nahi ata phir*. And we have two functions in school *phir us mai participate kaisey kerain gae?* Haina na. *agr bemar ho jaen gy tu kysay participate karein gy?*

In the above mentioned example, of the interaction between teacher and students is bilingual with the greater frequency of the English language. It is notable that the students have replied in the English language as the reply consists of the usual responses to the teacher. The interaction started in the English language and then it moves towards the bilingual conversation. The purpose of using bilingual discourse is to make the students understand the things the teacher is mentioning in the conversation. However interestingly as compared to the conversation in the first identified social stratum instead of code mixed vocabulary items in the Urdu sentences, the above example has code switched structures. Though the teacher has used few code mixed vocabulary items but the major part of the conversation has complete sentences in one language followed by a complete sentence in another language. The discourse is mainly comprised of English and Urdu languages. This is due to the fact that the teachers require students to understand their discourse as well and to give them the input in English language is also necessary so it results into a bilingual discourse with higher frequency of English language. The tone of the discourse is informal which is clearly depicted by the Urdu expressions *Haina na* as it is not an expression in the standard or written Urdu.

The other interaction took place when a student came late in the class because she was sick, the teacher had an informal dialogue with her as she asked her about her health. The interaction again takes place as a bilingual interaction with code switched patterns.

Teacher: Manahil *betay* mama *neychay hein?* She is waiting?

The student replied yes with her head nod. So the teacher continues the conversation and addresses her as follows:

Teacher: How are you now? *Apki tabeat theek hai ab?* Ok come here so that we can complete the work. *Phir ap mama k sath chali jana.*

c) Third Identified Social Stratum

In the third identified social stratum the instances of the informal interaction between students and teachers takes place in the following way. In the following instance upon the arrival of the observer in the class a student asked the teacher:

Student: Ma'am are you be out today?

Teacher: No, I'll be in class.

Student: Ma'am Amna going out?

Teacher: No.

Interestingly the student has asked the teacher in English language and the teacher replied in the same language as well. Few other instances of informal interaction between teachers and students are as follows. The teacher asked the students about their weekend activity and the conversation prolongs.

Teacher: How was your weekend?

Students: Good.

Teacher: Good? Ok. What you did on weekend? Did you go somewhere?

Student 1: I don't go anywhere.

Student 2: I go to park.

Teacher: I went to park Manahil.

Student 3: I go to centaurus.

Teacher: I went to centaurus.

Student 4: I went to Mc. Donalds.

Teacher: You know I also went to Mc. Donalds on Friday. But two days I took rest.

Student5: Ma'am I too went to Mc. Donalds.

Teacher: What did you eat there? A burger or an icecream?

Student 5: I eat burger.

Student 6: I went for ice cream.

In the above mentioned example, the teacher has initiated the conversation in English and the students respond in the same language. However the teacher corrects the grammatical mistake the students make and then the others have picked up the corrected grammatical structure. One of the students interrupts the teacher and asked

Student: Ma'am, have you eaten Chicken *Tikka*?

Teacher: Yes on Sunday night I went to the restaurant and ate it.

There was another interesting exchange between teacher and the students inside the class as the student demands a blank paper.

Student: Ma'am can you give me a paper?

Teacher: What do you need paper for?

Student: I have to write my mama's number and give it to Shaheer.

Teacher: Do you know her number?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Why do you want to give her number to Shaheer?

Student: He will come to my home.

Teacher: OK. I'll give you paper at the end of the day.

In another instance the teacher asked the students to inform their mothers about the cancellation of the open day as it turned out to be an interesting interaction.

Teacher: You are going to tell mama that open day is cancelled on Saturday.

Student: Why Ma'am?

Teacher: Because of rain.

Student: I'll have fun with my *nano*, she is coming on Saturday.

The word *nano* is used for the maternal grandmother in Urdu language and is an informal word to address the grandmother. The word shows love and warmth associated with the relation of maternal grandmother.

4.2 Category B: Informal Interaction between Teachers and Students Outside the class

a) First Identified Social Stratum

The teachers did not accompany the students outside the classroom. The students were just allowed to go out for a selective period of time either to drink water or to go to the washroom. The students went out for the break downstairs where there were swings in a small area near the gate. The students do not go out every day on the swings during the break time. Even if they go out on the swings they are not accompanied by the teachers. So in this way there is no interaction between teachers and students outside the classroom. No teacher is present with the students at the swing area as well. It is just the guard who is standing at the gate that he looks after the students if they go in that area.

b) Second Identified Social Stratum

The class teachers accompany the students during the break time. Class teachers accompany the students during the music class as well. Students from the schools of the second identified social stratum also have a games period where they are accompanied by the games teacher.

The first instance of the informal interaction between teachers and students is from the break time. During the break time as the students went out to play in the playing area they saw a lady bug and the ones who saw the lady bird called their friends and all of them gathered around the lady bird as their teacher talks to them.

Students: Teacher see ladybug.

Teacher: *Beta ladybug pareshan ho rha hai*, stand up all of you, leave the lady bug, *chor dein usay*.

So the students moved aside but when the students again gathered around the lady bug and place their fingers in front of the insect, one of the teachers talks to them as:

Teacher: *Betay ap walk kr rhy ho koe ap k samnay aa k khara ho jaey tu ap pareshan houn gy na*. This is baby lady bug.

Student: This is baby ladybug?

Teacher: Yes, so let it walk, don't touch it just watch it. *Dykho wo kysy walk kr rha hai*.

Student: Teacher *hamary garden me b aya tha lady bug*.

Teacher: Ok. *Betay let lady bug enjoy the break. Lady bug ki b break hai*.

In the above example the interaction between the teachers and students is bilingual. The interaction has more code switched patterns as compared to the code mixed elements. The students' language has code mixed vocabulary items as well. They all are aware of the use of all English vocabulary items like walk and garden even if a sentence is in Urdu language.

c) Third Identified Social Stratum

The instances of informal interaction between teachers and students outside the class in third identified social stratum are also present. The first instance is of the morning time when the coordinator is greeting the students as she is standing outside the Montessori block.

Co-ordinator: Hello. Good Morning pretty. Where were you? We missed you. Did you miss your teacher and your friends?

Student: Yes.

Co-ordinator: Give me high five. (The student gave her high five). Good.

Co-ordinator: Good Morning handsome. How are you? Good?

The student nods his head.

Co-ordinator: Good Morning Amna. You are looking princess today. It's your birthday today?

Student: Yes.

Co-ordinator: You are wearing such a nice dress. Give me high five. (The student gave her high five)

The analysis of the data reveals that there is very less teacher student informal interaction inside as well as outside the classroom in the first identified social stratum. This is due to the fact that the social interaction in the first identified social stratum is very less. Students are considered to respect the teachers and the teachers have lesser informal interaction with the students. Most of the time inside the classroom is spent in memorizing or studying the lesson given by the teachers. The teachers are also very less interested in talking to the students in an informal way. This may be due to the reason that the teachers are professionally stressed, and they are not in the habit of treating students in an informal way. Another reason is that students are hesitant to talk to the teachers. The teachers are strict enough and this has made the students hesitant to interact with the teachers. The students do not go out in the first identified social stratum and in this way they do not interact with the teachers outside the classroom as well. The only instance of outside the classroom activity is the morning assembly which is a formal event and does not leave space for an informal interaction.

In the second identified social stratum the informal interaction between teachers and students takes place inside as well as outside the classrooms. The teachers are very open to the students and the students and the students do not hesitate to talk to the teachers about anything that has attracted their attention or interest. Bilingual discourse is used for the informal interaction inside and outside classroom. Students also use code mixed patterns while talking to the teachers and the same is practiced by the teachers. The teachers shifted and mixed codes in order to make the interaction less formal and to lessen the distance between the students and themselves. The teachers have discussed issues and things that need to be dealt in an informal way and have made the students aware of them. Teachers have accompanied the students outside the classroom during the break time as well as during their music and movie classes and this has increased the frequency of informal interaction between the teachers and the students.

The informal interaction between teachers and students in the third identified social stratum takes place in the English language with very less instances of code-mixed patterns. In the third identified social stratum the language of interaction is English hence the informal interaction also takes place in that language. Students are confident enough to talk to the teachers about anything and they are very friendly with the teachers. The hesitation level is very low in the third identified social stratum. This is due to the social identity. The social class in which students move gives them the

confidence as well as exposure to be confident and bold and this is very clear in contrast to the students of first identified social stratum where students are not confident because they lack exposure.

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