

SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN RURAL PAKISTANI CLT CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY OF A GOVERNMENT BOYS HIGH SCHOOL IN FAISALABAD

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Abstract

This study investigates sociolinguistic constraints affecting government secondary school students' communicative competence in rural Faisalabad, Pakistani classrooms where Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is officially implemented. The research is grounded in the communicative competence framework which was proposed by Dell Hymes (1972). Further, the study explores how social, linguistic, and structural factors influence learners' ability to communicate effectively in English. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed, and data were collected through classroom observations and informal interviews with students and teachers at a Government Boys High School in rural Faisalabad. The findings reveal that students face significant challenges in English communication due to first language interference, particularly the influence of Urdu Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure on English Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) syntactic pattern. There is limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and a lack of confidence during interaction. The study further indicates that although students possess some grammatical knowledge, they lack sociolinguistic and strategic competences to speak in the direct and natural way which is required for real-life communication. The research highlights the gap between Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) policy and actual classroom practice in rural contexts. In the end, the study suggests the need for context-sensitive pedagogical strategies to improve communicative competence.

Keywords

Communicative Competence, Dell Hymes, Sociolinguistic Constraints, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Urdu L1 (Language One) SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) Pattern, English L2 (Language Two) SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) Structure, SLA (Second Language Acquisition)

Introduction

The English language has a significant position in Pakistan as a medium of education, official communication, and global interaction. For decades, various educational reforms have attempted to improve English language teaching, particularly through the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The primary goal of CLT is to develop learners' ability to communicate effectively with fluency in real-life situations rather than to meet grammatical competence merely with the grammatical rules and principles. However, despite these reforms, many students, especially in rural areas, continue to face difficulties in achieving communicative competence in English speaking skills.

The concept of communicative competence, introduced by Dell Hymes (1972) marked a shift from purely structural views of language to a more functional and socially grounded understanding. Hymes argued that knowing a language involves not only grammatical correctness but also the

ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts. This includes understanding when to speak, what to say, and how to say it in a given situation of natural speech production. In the context of English as a second language (ESL), communicative competence becomes particularly important, as learners must navigate between their native language and the target language.

In Pakistan, English is taught as a compulsory subject from early schooling; however, the classroom environment often remains teacher-centered and examination-oriented. Students are typically encouraged to memorize grammatical rules and textbook content rather than engage in meaningful communication. This issue becomes more pronounced in rural areas, where students have limited exposure to use English outside the classroom as a language. Urdu or regional languages dominate everyday communication in the street or with friends and fellows which restricts opportunities for practicing English in real-life contexts.

One of the major linguistic challenges faced by Pakistani learners is the structural difference between Urdu and English. Urdu follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) sentence structure, while English follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) syntactic pattern. This difference often leads to syntactic interference, where learners transfer native language patterns into English, resulting in incorrect sentence formation and reduced fluency. For instance, a student may say, "I homework do" instead of "I do homework" reflecting a direct translation from Urdu to English.

To move from the past to present all methods and approaches including CLT approach to teach and acquire a language, especially the proficiency and competence of English reflecting the shift in focus over time. First of all, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM, 18th-19th centuries) was used to teach classical Greek and Latin languages. It has emphasized over the rules and translation. It focused on written language and was pioneered by scholars like Johann Meisner. It dominated traditional classrooms. Next the Direct Method (late 19th century) focused on immersion and to promote speaking skills. It was led by Maximilian Berlitz. The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM, mid-20th century) used drills for habit formation and was influenced by Charles Fries and Robert Lado. After it, the well known Silent Way (1960s) came under practice to promote learner autonomy through minimal teacher input. It was developed by Caleb Gattegno. The Suggestopedia (1970s) aimed for relaxed learning through Georgi Lozanov's techniques. To move towards the Total Physical Response (TPR, 1970s) linked the language with physical response. The credit went to James Asher. Further more, a targeted, well known, prominent and proficient relevant with this study, known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT, 1970s-present) emphasizes real communication, shaped by an American linguist and anthropologist "Dell Hymes" who introduced the concept of "communicative competence" in language learning and who is super influential in shaping how we teach languages today while to focus on real communication over just grammar rules. His work's still widely referenced in language teaching and learning along with Wilkins. Later, Content-Based Instruction (CBI, 1980s) focused on learning content through language (Mohan). Then, Task-Based Learning (TBL, 1980s) came under practice to promote real tasks (Prabhu). The Lexical Approach (1990s) highlights vocabulary chunks (Michael Lewis). But the most advanced, situational, very familiar for many teachers to teach the language and the need-based Eclectic Approach (1990s-present). It sums up all other approaches, methods and techniques, blending meanwhile for the effectiveness of acquisition output. Each method contributed to today's diverse teaching landscape, shaping global language learning. This journey of TMs continues as per the requirement of both language-teachers and learners to impact classrooms worldwide with practical implications.

Research on the methods of language teaching and as the teaching of language underwent a remarkable journey of its evolutionary uphill, certainly over the past century. It has been the subject of under discussion that how languages are acquired and the fruitful purpose of teaching. In the beginning of its previous time, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) became very famous in the 19th century. It emphasized memorization of grammatical rules and translation of texts with rote learning of vocabulary (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It proved to teach two passive skills of language as reading and writing instead of listening and speaking. Direct Method (DM) in the late 19th emerged after GTM early in the 20th centuries. To promote oral communication and two active skills of the language as listening and speaking with target language. It is still being focused heavily on accuracy (Howatt, 1984). The next Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) became very prominent within the periods of time around the 1940s-1960s. It was influenced by the psychology of Noam Chomsky's behaviorism. It focused on repetition, drills, and habit formation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). All these mentioned previously three prominent methods of teaching laid the groundwork to shift from form-focused teaching towards meaning-focused instruction. The last approach as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1970s to fulfil the need of language to be used as a functional based tool of communication. It emphasized real-life communication and social interaction with fluency (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Significance of the Study

This study is widely significant because it contributes to the understanding of sociolinguistic constraints affecting communicative competence in rural Pakistani classrooms in Faisalabad. It provides practical insights for teachers to improve classroom interaction and encourages the use of communicative activities. Additionally, it supports the theoretical framework by Dell Hymes (1972) demonstrating how social and linguistic factors influence language use in real contexts. The findings may also assist curriculum developers and policymakers in designing more effective language teaching strategies for rural education system.

Research Rationale

The rationale of this research lies in the persistent gap between the theoretical goals of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the actual communicative performance of students in rural Pakistani classrooms contexts. Despite the inclusion of communicative approaches in the curriculum, learners continue to struggle with basic English communication due to sociolinguistic barriers and structural constraints. This study is therefore necessary to explore the real challenges in a classroom based on natural context and provide context-specific insights that can improve language teaching practices.

Statement of the Problem

Communicative competence, as explained by Dell Hymes (1972) refers to the ability to use language appropriately in real social situations rather than focusing only on grammatical accuracy. Mostly, research conducted in Pakistan shows that despite the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at the secondary level, learners still struggle to develop effective English communication skills due to factors like traditional teaching practices, limited classroom interaction, and exam-focused instruction (Bashir et al., 2025; Noor et al., 2022). Studies also suggest that important components of communicative competence, especially sociolinguistic and discourse skills, are not adequately developed in Pakistani classrooms because of pedagogical and contextual limitations (Younis & Shah, 2023). However, little attention has been given to rural settings, especially regarding how differences between Urdu (SOV) and English (SVO) sentence structures influence students' communicative performance. Therefore, the current research aims

to address this gap by examining sociolinguistic constraints affecting secondary school students' communicative competence in a rural government boys' high school in Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited to a single Government Boys High School in Faisalabad and uses qualitative data from classroom observations and informal interviews without recordings, which may affect depth of analysis. It is delimited to secondary school students in rural classrooms, focusing only on sociolinguistic constraints on communicative competence in English and is guided by Dell Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence. It does not include other language skills or quantitative analysis.

Research Objectives

In the light of above mentioned research problem, the present study is guided by the following two research objectives to:

1-Identifying sociolinguistic constraints are the most evident to shape the rural students' communicative competence at government boys high school CLT classrooms in Faisalabad, Pakistan?

2-Examine the differences between Urdu (SOV) and English (SVO) sentence syntactic patterns influence students' communicative performance in ESL classroom interaction?

Research Questions

RQ1-Which sociolinguistic constraints are the most evident to shape the rural students' communicative competence at government boys high school CLT classrooms in Faisalabad, Pakistan?

RQ2-How do differences between Urdu (SOV) and English (SVO) sentence syntactic patterns influence students' communicative performance in ESL classroom interaction?

Literature Review

process of second language acquisition (SLA) reflects a long trajectory. It moved from form-focused approaches to communicative and meaning-centered paradigms. Through the periods of history, the method of teaching a language English as specific, Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) (19th century) prioritized the memorization of grammatical forms and translation with textual analysis (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The focus of GTM was predominantly on reading and writing. There was little attention towards communicating orally or to compete interactionally. This was followed by the Direct Method. It emerged in the late 19th to early 20th century. It emphasized learning through speaking the same as an infant or child like a natural process for language acquisition inductively. Speaking and listening was the target without use of L1 (Howatt, 1984). Subsequently, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) around the mid - 20th century drew on the principles of behaviorism and the physiological school of thoughts by John B.Watson and B.F.Skinner. It consisted of repetition and drills for building linguistic habits (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To come forward approaches such as Situational Language Teaching sought to teach grammar and vocabulary through controlled contexts and functional dialogue (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was developed in the 1970s. It marked a paradigm shift toward emphasizing interaction and meaningful communication along with pragmatic use of language (Canale & Swain, 1980). CLT method of teaching works as language learning within real-world. Communicative contexts are focused rather than isolated structural exercises. It is argued that competence involves not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competencies (Hymes, 1972). The focus and exact target of CLT method

is towards interactional meaning and negotiation. It is based on task performance which distinguishes it from all other teaching earlier techniques, strategies and methods that were primarily form-driven (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of CLT generally in enhancing communicative competence. It was found through systematic reviews of Li and Shuib (2026) that CLT impacts positively to oral proficiency and learner engagement towards diverse educational contexts. Although the results for reading and writing are more variable to depend on implementation quality. Khaydarbek (2025) found that the contribution of CLT is to increase motivation and the participation of activity in the teaching environment of ESL classrooms. Teacher pre-preparation and contextual constraints can moderate its effectiveness in secondary schools of Pakistan. Bashir et al. (2025) reported that CLT led to significant improvements in building confidence of students and their oral fluency which can be compared to traditional methods under systemic challenges such as exam-oriented curricula or resource scarcity which limited gains for some learners in ESL. Despite all the benefits of CLT as documented under existing research has limitations, especially regarding rural contexts for Govt. boys high schools. Most of the studies in Pakistan are conducted in urban or well-resourced settings for CLT method which left or neglected rural schools underrepresented (Bashir et al., 2025). In other contexts, factors such as class size, teacher training, and background of learner are significant determinants of CLT outcomes (Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024). These contextual variables have rarely been studied in rural Pakistani classrooms. So it suggests a gap in literature concerning CLT and its implementation in under-resourced environments but especially its exposure to English beyond the classroom is limited.

The second major strand about the research of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) is concerning cross-linguistic influence and negative transfer. It happens when structural features of the first language Urdu (L1) are imposed on the second language English as (L2) to produce non-native patterns. It can disrupt fluency and accuracy (Odlin, 1989). Under the subject of cross-linguistic influence, its empirical work demonstrates that grammatical errors in ESL learners' output are often predictable based on typological differences between languages (Berzak et al., 2016). This mismatch of typology is particularly relevant for Urdu speakers while learning English under the syntactic rules of Urdu to follow a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order accordingly English uses Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) (Khan, 2020). Studies through the aspects of bilingual or multilingual contexts confirm that such syntactic differences can contribute to persistent structural errors. If it is not addressed through instruction that explicitly raises learner awareness (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

Research shows the L1 influence in Pakistan has been documented as an interference in L2 fluency. It has been effecting thoroughly at lexical and syntactic levels. Typically in written contexts or as broad descriptions there are more effects that can be shown in ESL classrooms rather than empirical classroom investigations e.g. Jabeen et al. (2025) noted that Urdu structural patterns affect English output among Pakistani learners. Especially their study has focused largely on written errors and there is a lack of observational component. Similarly, Haroon et al. (2023) examined specific grammatical constructions influenced by Urdu. They have not linked these structural findings to communicative performance or pedagogical practice. An important reality of pedagogical situations is highlighted by these studies. The typological differences on the other hand can be documented structurally. Obviously their real-world impact on communicative fluency of L2 English within instructional contexts remains underexplored.

Between structural descriptions of the interference of L1 Urdu/Punjabi and classroom-oriented research, the gap is present as to be another evident in broader aspects of SLA literature. Many studies on negative transfer focus on written accuracy or error typologies (Ellis, 2008). Far fewer link syntactic interference to oral fluency outcomes. Research in multilingual settings suggests that L1 influence persists even under communicative approaches. It indicates that interference cannot be eliminated merely by adopting CLT. It must be addressed explicitly through pedagogical strategies that integrate structural awareness with communicative tasks (Smith & Nguyen, 2022). Hence there is limited empirical investigation into how such integration operates in authentic classrooms. The language learners must negotiate meanings in real time.

A third area of omission in the literature pertains especially to the context of rural school. Most of the studies on CLT and language transfer is conducted under the settings of urban side, university level, or towards adult learners. That shows insufficient attention to secondary school learners in rural government boys schools. Learners, especially from rural areas, often have reduced access to English input outside the classroom. It may rely more heavily on L1 structures. Certain dynamics of interference and fluency development in such contexts are likely to differ from those in urban schools (Rahman & Anwar, 2019). This suggests that the impact of cross-linguistic interference on communicative fluency towards rural learners in CLT classrooms have remained under investigated.

Finally, less studies present research that explicitly integrates CLT under cross-linguistic interference at syntactic level with its different sentence patterns and various grammatical syntactic structures; and then communicative fluency outcomes in a single empirical framework. Systematic reviews of CLT research are to identify consistently the fluency as an outcome variable. Rarely, it examines how structural interference from L1 affects this outcome in classrooms that adopt communicative tasks (Li & Shuib, 2026; Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024). In similar ways, studies of cross-linguistic influence often do not model how pedagogical approaches like CLT might mediate or exacerbate interference effects in spoken interaction. This gap is particularly pronounced in the Pakistani teaching language scenario. The dual challenges of L1 Urdu/Punjabi interfere with limited instructional resources.

To conclude, the literature regarding CLT's research potential reveals evidence to enhance communicative competence, as well as substantial proof that L1 Urdu/Punjabi interference affects L2 English production. Few studies integrate these strands or examine them in the settings of rural secondary schools. The lack of research that connects cross-linguistic syntactic interference with communicative fluency outcomes in CLT classrooms. It occurred in government boys' high schools towards the downtown of Faisalabad which signaled an important empty space in the field. To address this gap is developing pedagogically relevant insights in criticality that can guide one of the most effective teaching strategies in under-resourced educational environments for the teaching of language in fruitful ways and manners.

Methodology

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive case study design to investigate sociolinguistic constraints affecting students' communicative competence in rural Pakistani classrooms. The study is guided by Dell Hymes' (1972) the theory of communicative competence, focusing on real-life language use in classroom contexts.

Research Site

The research was conducted at a Government Boys High School in Jaranwala, Faisalabad, Pakistan representing a rural educational setting where English is taught as a second language (ESL).

Participants and Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 10-15 secondary school students from Grades 9 and 10, along with one or two English teachers. Participants were selected based on their regular attendance and involvement in English classroom activities.

Data Collection Methods

Data is collected through classroom observations and informal interviews. The researcher conducted non-participant observations and recorded detailed field notes focusing on students' communicative behavior, while using Urdu and English, within the classroom interaction pattern. In addition, short informal interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers, and responses were noted manually due to lack of recording facilities in a noisy environment.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed to use thematic analysis for identifying recurring patterns related to sociolinguistic constraints for English speaking fluently. Key themes may include first language interference, lack of confidence, limited exposure to English, and barriers of classroom communication in direct and natural way.

Ethical Considerations

The study sought permission from the administration of the school. All participants provided informed consent. Student identities were anonymized. The data was stored securely to ensure confidentiality. Participation was voluntary. Participants could withdraw at any time with no hesitation. It ensured both structural linguistic patterns and contextual classroom factors through this methodology.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the theory of Communicative Competence by Dell Hymes (1972), specifically the dimension of Feasibility. A Qualitative Descriptive Case Study design is following the naturalistic inquiry model which is selected to provide an in-depth, holistic exploration of syntactic constraints through the "bounded system" of a rural boys school from the government sector. It focuses on the quality of linguistic performance rather than numerical data. The targeted population comprises secondary-level English learners under Hymes' (1972) theory from rural Faisalabad. This represents a critical stage where L1 Urdu/Punjabi to L2 English syntactic interference is most fossilized which is providing rich data for qualitative analysis

Further, the study through Hymes' (1972) communicative competence model, emphasizes that language proficiency extends beyond grammatical knowledge which includes sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. This framework expresses that fluency is not only the ability to produce correct sentences meanwhile is the ability to use language in an appropriate way and context relevance. Certainly towards ESL classrooms from rural areas where Urdu/Punjabi is predominant as L1, syntactic interference which often disrupts learners' ability for the achievement of communicative competence. Traditional teaching methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method and structural approaches which focus on the memorization of grammatical rules and the principles of composition where accuracy is reinforced by L1-dependent patterns and limiting spontaneous language production (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Cook, 2001). But in contrast, CLT provides structured opportunities to interact and task-based practices, which aligns with Hymes'

multidimensional concepts of competence to address both cognitive and social aspects of language use.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected through classroom observations and informal interviews was thematically analyzed for identifying the patterns related to the sociolinguistic constraints which affect communicative competence to speak fluently without any fear and hesitation. The analysis is guided by the communicative competence framework of Dell Hymes (1972) focusing on how learners use language in real classroom contexts and in the natural way of language spoken production.

Research Critique

This research strongly supports the communicative competence (actively speaking and fluently utterances of English sentences) value through the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the ESL environment of language teaching and acquisition. CLT enhances oral proficiency, fluency, and learner engagement while comparing with other traditional methods and approaches e.g. Grammar-Translation Method, (Bashir et al., 2025; Li & Shuib, 2026). Pakistani contexts reflect similar findings, to indicate that CLT leads to significant improvements in English fluency and confidence among secondary school learners (Bashir et al., 2025; Ehsan et al., 2026). Though challenges such as large class sizes and limited resources persist (Rehman et al., 2023). Research also highlights that CLT fosters communicative competence beyond structural accuracy, including intercultural awareness and motivational gains (Gohar & Aslam, 2024; Khan et al., 2022). Complementing these communicative competence findings based the literature on first-language interference underscores the influence of patterns and structures of native language on second language production and outcomes. Studies on Urdu speakers show persistent syntactic errors such as misuse of the article and preposition errors along with subject-verb agreement issues due to negative L1 transfer (Masood et al., 2020; Jabeen et al., 2025). Cross-linguistic studies further reveal that the number of differences in typology between L1 and English lead to the patterns of error. It can affect communicative fluency if not addressed communicatively (Obando, 2015; Sultana et al., 2025). It is confirmed by other comparative research from the multilingual context that L1 interference remains a critical factor across phonological and syntactic domains (Mirzayev, 2024; Fontiveros-Malana, 2018). Collectively all these studies highlight the need for instructional designs which integrate the principles of CLT with the targeted strategies to cope with L1 interference for the improvement of ESL fluency results.

Hymes' concepts of Communicative Competence

For purposeful data analysis of this study goes through the concepts under Hymes' (1972) concept of Communicative Competence. It well defines the language proficiency beyond its grammatical knowledge including the ability of communication in the most effective way under social contexts. Four components e.g. grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence all are clearly identified just in Hymes' (1972) structure of Communicative Competence. It is most relevant to understand how Urdu SOV patterns intervene English SVO proficiency of production level in classrooms of CLT teaching phenomena. This theory allows especially for an exploration of fluency as both a linguistic and social construct. It emphasizes meaning-focused communication along with structural accuracy.

Negative Transfer and Interference of cross linguistic Syntax

The pattern which was observed dominantly in learner output is the transfer of Urdu syntactic structures into English. But in Urdu which follows a typical Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order

while in English the certain pattern of Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) is followed. This difference of structural order leads towards regular learning errors e.g. “I homework write”, “I hockey play” and “I clothes wash” reflects directly L1 interference. Such types of error patterns directly align with the theory “Transfer of Language in which the existing knowledge of linguistics shapes the production of a second language learning process (Odlin, 1989). Such types of errors are not random, instead systematic to indicate the learners’ reliance on Urdu as a thinking base to construct English sentences. It resulted in the production of delayed speech production or the reduction of speech fluency. The reason is very common and clear for the learners from the rural sides have to formulate sentences mentally first in Urdu then to translate them into English. It provides disruption as a result. The fluency is disrupted by pauses and hesitation remains during the speech. Ellis (1997) argues that such kind of transfer negatively has become entrenched when the failures of instructional practices promote independent L2 processing. Further the pattern to auxiliary verbs and the way to format questions are notable challenges. Learners often produce sentences such as “You are writing homework?” instead of “Are you writing homework?” or the omission of auxiliaries altogether. It reflects the pattern of Urdu for interrogative sentences. It's very common for learners to add -ing with the second form of verb like “I am wanting to school” to not regard the specific feature of English for the forms of the verb to differentiate between gerund and participle correctly. These syntactic deviations, as a proof, highlight the depth of L1 influence and extend beyond the specific English patterns or word order towards broader sentence structures.

Code-Switching and ESL (English as Second Language) Classroom Language Use

One of the most prominent findings of the research is the frequent use of Urdu and Punjabi lexical items and code-switching during English lessons. Students rarely used English as a complete medium of communication. They relied heavily on their native language to express ideas and share their thoughts to participate in communicative activities. The reason is English is mostly taught as a subject rather than to be treated as a language to command speaking power with fluency according to the theory of Hymes (2872). The output is lack of speaking naturally to feel easier while producing sentences. For example, when students were asked to describe their daily routine, one student responded: “Mein subah uthta hun, hath mohn dhota hn, phir nashta karta hun aur directly school chala ata hun.” (Translation: I get up early in the morning, wash my hands and face, have breakfast, and come to school directly.) This response clearly shows that the students are more comfortable expressing their ideas in Urdu rather than trying to speak English. Students are often reluctant in Urdu while mixing both languages: “Sir mera friend kal mery home aya aur hum ny ground men cricket kheli.” (Sir my friend came to my home yesterday, and we played cricket on the ground.) Such examples indicate that students possess basic vocabulary but lack the ability to construct complete English sentences easily. Code-switching serves as a compensatory strategy. It also reflects limited communicative competencies.

Syntactic Interference: L1 Urdu/Punjabi SOV Syntactic Structure vs L2 English SVO Patterns

Another major theme emerging from the data is syntactic interference of Urdu or Punjabi as L1 (first or native language) L2 (second or foreign language to learn) English. It is due to the structural differences between Urdu and English. Students frequently transferred Urdu sentence patterns Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) into English Subject-Verb-Object (SVO).

The result is the production of incorrect sentences or mostly learners' silence instead of active participation in speaking English. Examples observed in classroom interaction include:

- "I school go."
- "My father office goes."
- "She homework complete."
- "My friend fast run."
- "Daily I park go."

These sentences reflect direct translation from Urdu structure instead of proper English syntax. During interviews, one student explained: "Hum pehle Urdu mein banaty hain phir zehn men English tarjma karty hen." (Translation: We first make Urdu and then in our brain we translate it into English.) This finding highlights the cognitive process of translation, which slows down communication competence and reduces fluency as is guided by Hymes (1972) in the theory of "Communicative Competence." Students remain unable to produce spontaneous English sentences because their maximum rely on their native language structure.

Fear of Errors and Lack of Confidence

A prominent and well significant sociolinguistic factor which is identified in the data is the lack of confidence among students. Most of the students expressed fear of making mistakes and showed confusion how to construct properly or anxiety of fluency while speaking English. It discouraged them to participate in classroom interaction. For example, one student stated as "Sir English bolty huey dar lagta hai ke jumla galat na ho jaye aur baqi sab hansen gy" (Translation: I feel afraid while speaking English because I might make mistakes and peer will make fun of my incorrect sentences). This type of English-speaking anxiety and fear of utterance is often reinforced by peer reactions and the sociolinguistic environment of the classroom. Most of the students always prefer to remain silent rather than risk making errors to produce purely correct sentences. It limits their communicative practices.

English with Limited Exposure

The data reveals that students have very limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Urdu is the dominant language used at home with friends, and in the community towards the rural settings. A participant explained: "Sir g hum ghar men aur apny doston ke sath Punjabi ya Urdu bolete hain, English tu sirf class tak hoti hai" (Translation: Sir, we speak Punjabi or Urdu at our home and with our friends; English is only used in class). This lack of exposure reduces opportunities for practicing English in the contexts based on real-life rural set-up which is essential for developing communicative competence (Hymes, 1972).

Classroom Interaction Patterns

Classroom observations show that interaction is mostly teacher-centered. Teachers often explain concepts in Urdu and rarely engage students in communicative activities. When students are asked to participate, they either remain silent or respond in Urdu. For example, a teacher asks the students "Describe your favourite food in English."

The student replies as "sir mujhe tu biryani boht pasand hai because abbu aksar bazar sy latey hen" (I like biryani the most because papa often brings it from the street). This kind of response demonstrates partial use of English but strong reliance on Urdu. Such patterns to interact limit the fluency development and lack communicative competence.

Data Discussion

The findings of the research highlight the complex interplay between sociolinguistic and structural factors to shape students' communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). According to the Hymes' (1972) framework, it is proved that learners possess limited grammatical competence but struggle significantly with sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The frequent use of code-switching indicates that students attempt to communicate but could not because of lacking the linguistic resources to do so fully in English. It is proof that communicative competence is not only about knowing only about the language rather to use it effectively also in context.

Syntactic interference emerges as a major barrier to become fluent in communication. The influence of Urdu Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure on English Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sentence patterns demonstrates that learners rely heavily on their native language system. This finding supports existing research on first language transfer but also highlights its strong presence in rural Faisalabad, Pakistan contexts.

Further, the lack of confidence and the fear of making mistakes which make the issue more complicated. Students are aware of their limitations and prefer to avoid communication instead of errors' risk. This creates a cycle where the deficiency of practice leads towards continued weakness in communicative competence.

From the pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that "Communicative Language Teaching" (CLT) is not implemented effectively in the observed classroom. Although the curriculum promotes communicative teaching, the classroom practices remain traditional and teacher-centered because of learners' community backgrounds and rural settings. This gap between theory and practice limits students' opportunities for constructing and formulating sentences to develop the synthetic production based on real-life communication skills.

Data Cross Findings

Current findings of the researcher are consistent with previous research conducted in Pakistan, which highlights that students in public schools face significant challenges in developing English communicative competence (Bashir, Khan, & Ahmed, 2025; Noor, Ali, & Shah, 2022). Similar to earlier research, this study has also found that the students from Government Boys Secondary School in rural Faisalabad, Pakistan rely heavily on their first language, leading to code-switching and incomplete English sentence formation. However, the present study extends previous research to focus specially on rural classroom dynamics. While earlier studies mainly discussed general language learning difficulties. In contrast, this research provides deeper insight into the role of syntactic interference (SOV vs SVO sentences patterns) to shape communicative performance for natural speaking.

Moreover, in contrast to urban-focused studies, this research shows that rural students face more persistent sociolinguistic challenges because of limited exposure to English. There is a lack of communicative opportunities too. These results reinforce the importance of considering context-specific factors when analyzing language learning. In relation to the theory of Communicative Competence by Dell Hymes (1972), this research confirms that communicative competence is not fully achieved due to deficiencies in sociolinguistic and strategic competence, though some grammatical knowledge exists.

Conclusion

This study examined sociolinguistic constraints affecting the communicative competence of secondary school students in a rural Faisalabad, Pakistani CLT classroom. The research is guided by Dell Hymes' (1972) communicative competence framework. The findings reveal that learners face numerous challenges due to the interference of first language L2 Urdu/Punjabi. There is limited exposure to English and lack of confidence in communication. The influence of Urdu Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure on English Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sentence formation emerged as a key factor to affect fluency and accuracy. The study further shows that the learners possess basic grammatical knowledge but they lack sociolinguistic and strategic competence which is mostly required to communicate effectively. In short, CLT implementation in rural contexts remains limited in practice. It is highlighting the need for improved teaching strategies to promote meaningful interaction and for reducing reliance on native language structures.

Recommendation and Suggestions

Research in the future should investigate the effects of "Translanguaging" on rural learners' long-time cognitive development and for practitioners, the study suggests shifting pedagogical focus from strict Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) accuracy toward the communicative "Strategic Competence". Teachers should design the tasks which must be using rural-centric materials for the reduction of language anxiety. While researchers ought to develop localized rural-based CLT models to meet whole need of competence and formally integrate L1 Urdu/Punjabi as a tool to scaffold rather to view it as a barrier to fluency.

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Appendix A: Informal Interview Questions

Questions from Students

- 1-Introduce yourself .
- 2-Do you feel comfortable speaking English in class? Why or why not?
- 3-What language do you usually use with your classmates during English lessons?
- 4-Do you think in Urdu before speaking English?
- 5-What difficulties do you face while speaking English?
- 6-Do you get enough opportunities to speak English in class?
- 7-How do your classmates react when you speak English?
- 8-Which language do you use at home and with friends?
- 9-Do you feel afraid of making mistakes while speaking English? Why?

Questions for Teachers

- 1-How long have you been teaching here
- 2-How do you usually conduct your English classes?
- 3-Do students actively participate in English communication activities?
- 4-What challenges do students face while speaking English?
- 5-Do students rely on Urdu during English lessons?
- 6-How do you encourage students to speak English?
- 7-Do you follow Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods?
- 8-What strategies do you use to improve students' communicative competence?

Appendix B: Classroom Observation Checklist

- Language used by students (English / Urdu / Mixed)
- Frequency of code-switching
- Student participation level (high / medium / low)
- Teacher's language (English / Urdu / Mixed)
- Type of classroom interaction (teacher-centered / student-centered)
- Use of communicative activities
- Students' confidence level while speaking
- Common grammatical/syntactic errors observed

Appendix C: Classroom Data Sample

Example 1:

Student response:

“Mein kal g gaon giya tha aur gawandiyon sy se mila.”

Translation: “I went to the village yesterday and met to the neighbours.”

Example 2:

Student response:

“I homework completing.”

Correct Sentence:

“I completed my homework.”

Example 3:

Student Response:

Hamary pind men chor aey aur kanko, munjiyon men look gaey.

Translation: “Thieves came at our village and hid themselves in rice and wheat crops.”