A Classroom Research on Whether Using L1 or L2 in L3 Acquisition

Lêkolîneke Polê li ser Bikaranîna Zimanê Yekem (L1) an jî Zimanê Duyem (L2) ji bo Fêrbûna Zimanê Sêyem (L3)

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PUXTE:

Li hin welatan, bo mînak li Tirkiyeyê xwendekar zimanê sêyem L3 (îngilîzî) bi rêya zimanê duyem L2 (tirkî) hîn dibin ne bi rêya zimanê yekem L1 (zimanê dayikê kurdî). Gelo dema li cihê zimanê duyem (L2) em zimanê sêyem (L3) fêrî xwendekaran dikin qet tu astengî derdikevin holê? Fêrbûna zimanê sêyem (L3) bi rêya zimanê duyem (L2) bêyî tu referansên bo zimanê zikmakî yê xwendekaran dikare pir bi zor û zehmet be. Di nava deh salên ku min dersa zimanê biyanî daye, xwendekarên ku di astên curbicur de ne, min dît ku rêjeya xeletiyên xwendekarên kurd ji rêjeya xwendekarên tirk yan jî yên bi eslê xwe kurd in lê nikarin bi kurdî biaxivin bilindtir bû. Piştî ku ez bi vê rêjeya xeletiyên xwendekaran ya wekî kêmtêgehiştina metnên xwendinê, rêziman û bêjeyan hesiyam, min biryar wergirt ku li ser vê pirsgirekê lêkolîneke polê li dar bixim. Armanca vê xebatê ew e ku fikr û ramanên xwendekaran li ser bikaranîna L2yê li cihê L1ê di hînbûn û fêrkirina L3ê de bizane, da ku derbixe holê bê ka ev rêbaz qenc e yan neqenc e. Lêkolîna me îddîa dike ku têkiliyeke nêzîk di navbera xeletiyên xwendekaran di fêrbûna zimanê ingilîzî ku ne bi rêya kurdî lê bi rêya tirkî tê dayin heye.

Peyvên Sereke: Fêrbûna L3, Kurdî, Metirsiya zimanê biyanî.

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ABSTRACT:

In some countries such as Turkey students are taught L3 (English) through L2 (Turkish) but not through L1 (their native language -Kurdish). Do we face any obstacles while the language we are trying to teach our students is not their second language (L2) yet our students' third language (L3)? Learning L3 could be difficult trough L2 without any reference of these students' native language. During the course of my ten years of teaching at multiple levels, I realized that the failure rate for

my Kurdish students was far higher than the general failure rate for other students who are Turkish or originally Kurdish but cannot speak Kurdish. After realizing this high failure such as low comprehension of reading, grammar, and even vocabulary among these students, I have decided to do a classroom research about this problem. This study aims to find out that students' opinions of the use of L2 instead of L1 in teaching and learning L3 in order to figure out whether this method is feasible or not. The research has suggested that there is a close relation between the students' failure and their tendency of learning English through Kurdish rather than Turkish.

Keywords: L3 acquisition, Kurdish, Foreign Language anxiety.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have been teaching English in eastern of Turkey for about 11 years and the students I teach are generally Kurdish students who learn all of their lessons through official language – Turkish. Some of the Kurdish students learn Turkish by being exposed to this language. So I can say that they pick up this language in their natural environment. However, some of them learn Turkish through a formal education at schools. They learn Turkish as their second language through which they learn all subjects. Most of the students in Van city cannot speak Turkish when they start primary schools so they have to learn Turkish, writing and reading at the same time.

While searching this subject I came across an interesting study by Loyd Dave, (1983) who has a book called "Bilingualism and mathematical reasoning in English as a second language" and in this book, the findings of a study of bilingual Punjabi, Mirpuri, Italian and Jamaican 11–13 year old children growing up in England are reported. It is stated that first language competence is an important factor in the child's ability to reason in mathematics in English as a second language. And also, It is suggested that the weaknesses in mathematics found among certain Asian and West Indian pupils may well be due to language factors. In Van city, the students are mostly Kurdish and they speak Kurdish at home; however they learn all subjects through Turkish at schools. Although Kurdish is widely spoken in homes across eastern regions of the country, Turkish is the national language and language of instruction in the state school system (Soykan, 2003). Therefore, many students in eastern regions are not permitted to speak, read, write, or otherwise learn in their mother language of Kurdish (Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes, 2008). According to the results of OSYM the Turkish level competence and performance of the Kurdish is not as good as the ones in western cities of Turkey. According to a report pub-

lished by the Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research (2011) Kurdish students who are educated in a language that they do not fully understand suffer from communication problems, trauma, feelings of exclusion and shame. They are less likely to succeed in school, and more likely to drop out early; on the other hand, most of the people interviewed said that during various stages of their primary school education they were also taught by Kurdish teachers who spoke Kurdish: they were able to communicate with them, they felt more at ease with them and they learned Turkish more easily by speaking Kurdish from time to time. They were thus more successful in their studies. My research also showed that when students study with medium of their own native language they feel more relaxed. Jim Cummins (2001) states that When the message, implicit or explicit, communicated to children in the school is "Leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door", children also leave a central part of who they are and their identities-at the door of the school. When they feel this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction. It is not enough for teachers to passively accept children's linguistic and cultural diversity in the school. He also states that They must be proactive and take the initiative to affirm children's linguistic identity by having posters in the various languages of the community around the school, encouraging children to write in their mother tongues in addition to the majority school language (e.g. write and publish pupil-authored bilingual books), and generally create an instructional climate where the linguistic and cultural experience of the whole child is actively accepted and validated. So I believe that this classroom research will not only shed light on why my students` English failure is so high but also it will show the importance of learning L2 or L3 through L1.

2. METHOD

The participants of this study were the students in my English classes of 9th and 10th grades in Niyazi Türkmenoğlu Anatolia High School in Van City, Turkey. The Students (5 females and 6 males) were chosen among the students who are originally Kurdish and can speak Kurdish very well. The average age of the participants were 15.5. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and that the information obtain will be confidential, anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire was translated for the participants so that they could understand

when filing out because these students are mostly unsuccessful students at English lesson. The questionnaire was designed to identify the attitude of the students towards to learning English through being taught by Turkish. They were asked to rate the item which they think most suitable for their learning attitudes toward the learning from the scale varying from 1=strongly disagree (2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4= agree) to 5= strongly agree. (see Appendix A, students' questionnaire)

Qualitative data analysis was used to find consistent patterns in the various perspectives revealed in the interview data. The Interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face (see Appendix B, The interview questions) They gave us a clearer picture of the problems students face in the language classes so I could get students'perceptions of learning during the English language classes. Furthermore, I applied a Turkish test (see Appendix B, students' Turkish Test) consisting of written and reading comprehension whereby I could gain insight of their Turkish competence and performance

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results will be discussed according to the items that students answered in the survey and interview

Graph1. Some Kurdish words help me to learn English words.
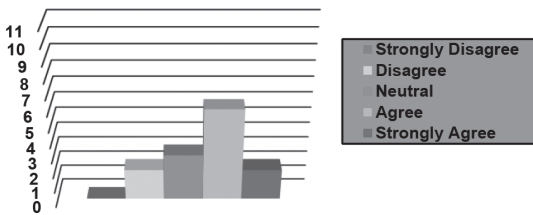
As we can see from this graph 8 students out of 11 students think that Kurdish words help them to learn English words better. When I search about some similar words in Kurdish and English I was surprised because there are some Kurdish words which are written and pronounced. nearly the same as English. Therefore, Kurdish students can easily learn many English words with the help of Kurdish words owing to similar words in both languages. I have added some words which sound and mean similar to English.

Table 1. Some similar Kurdish and English words

KURDISH	ENGLISH	TURKISH
Leng	Leg	Bacak
Hêk	Egg	Yumurta
Bira	Brother	Kardeş
No, Na, Ne	No	Hayır
Stêr	Star	Yıldız
Min e	Mine	Benim ki
Heşt	Eight	Sekiz
Mêr	Man	Adam
Du	Two	İki
Neh	Nine	Dokuz
Nû	New	Yeni
Sol	Shoe	Ayakkabı
Silop	Slop	Pislik, Çamur
Hiş	Head	Kafa, Akıl
Hesp	Horse	At
Bûn	Be	Olmak
Mê	Maid	Bayan, Bayan Hizmetkâr
Pirtûk	Book	Kitap
Min	Me	Beni- Ban
Ey, Ez	I (ay)	Ben
Kom	Community	Topluluk
Tu	You	Sen
Bûyîn	Being	Varolma
Deri	Door	Kapı
Bo, Ba	Blow	Rüzgar-Esmek
Çûk, Çik	Chick	Kuş, Kuş Yavrusu
Girîn	Cry	Ağlamak
Belek	Black	Siyah, Alaca
Pêl	Peeple	Çakıl
Deh	Ten	On
Berû	Berry	Yumuşak Meyve
Hop, Hilp	Hop	Sıçramak
Hol, Holik	home	Ev, kulübe
Rût	Nude	Çıplak
Nûha, Niha	Now	Şimdi

Tenik	Thin	İnce
Rast	Right	Sağ
Rast	Right	Doğru
Mirî, Mirt	Mortal	Ölüm, Ölümcül
Nay, Nav	Name	İsim
Ninik, Neynuk	Nail	Tırnak
Nedu, Neherdu	Neither	İkisi de değil
Nêzik	Near	Yakın
Poz	Nose	Burun
Dem	Time	Zaman
Rê, Ru	Route	Yol
Par	Part	Parça, Bölüm
Mîz	Piss	Sidik
Erd	Earth	Yer, Yeryüzü
Mayîn	Remain	Kalan
Şandin	Send	Göndermek
Xwestin	Want	İstemek
Şerm	Shame	Ayıp
Xezal	Gazalle	Ceylan
Lêv	Lip	Dudak
Cûhi	Jew	Yahudi
Birû	brow	Kaş
Firîn	Fly	Uçmak
Civan	Juvinile	Genç
Êş	Ache	Ağrı
Kurt	Short	Kısa
Vire	Here	Burda
Kiras	Dress	Giysi
Eylo	Eagle	Kartal
Barîn	Rain	Yağmak, Yağmur
Hiri, Sê	Three	üç
Çar	Four	Dört
Heyi, heye	Have	Sahip olmak
Ne heye	Not have	Sahip olmamak
Êvar	Evening	Akşam
Banqût	banquet	ziyafet
Alûlek	Alley	Dar geçit
Alêgir	Ally	Müttefik

As Cuenca & Hilferty state we tend to organize our knowledge using the conceptual categories and structures we already have, basing ourselves on similarity and depending on the world around us (1999). We can see the same reality during learning a language and the hypothesis that claims the typological distance between the respondents' L1 and English will influence the respondents' level of proficiency in English is supported by the studies of several researchers. One of them is Hakan Ringbom, who has a study (1987) and in this study he compares the acquisition of English for Swedish and Finnish speaking Finns. Finnish is structurally different from English, while Swedish is structurally closer to English. At the end of the study, Ringbom states that the typological distance plays a great role in the acquisition of English as a third language and cross-linguistic influence proves to be "overwhelmingly facilitative" for the Swedish-speaking Finns. As we can clearly see from table 1, there are a number of words in Kurdish that are similar to the english and we do not have any studies that search about that similarity. I assume that the Kurdish students can learn better by comparing their L1 Kurdish to L3 English.

Graph 2. Some Turkish words help me to learn English words.
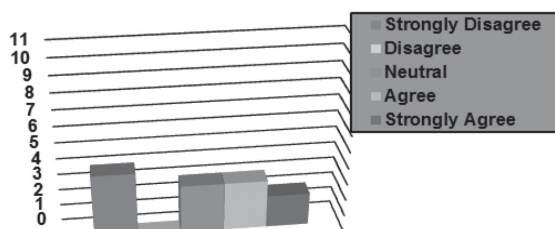
This graph shows us that the number of the students who thinks that Turkish words are helpful medium to learn English words and the students thinking it is not helpful almost equal. When we look at the table 1 we can realize that the Turkish words are not close to the English words as much as Kurdish ones. The morphological structures of the Turkish words are much more different than Kurdish words. According to UCLA International Institute "Turkish is a member of the Oghuz group of languages, a subgroup of the Turkic languages. There is a high degree of mutual intelligibility between Turkish and the other Oghuz languages, includ-

ing Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Qashqai, Gagauz, and Balkan Gagauz Turkish. Turkish is an agglutinative language and frequently uses affixes, and specifically suffixes, or endings" So Turkish is not in the same family as English language since English language belongs to the Anglo-Frisian sub-group of the West Germanic branch of the Germanic family, a member of the Indo-European languages (A History of the English Language, 2007) Since Kurdish belongs to the same group, It is easier for Kurdish students to use Kurdish as the medium language while learning English.

Graph 3. Kurdish helps me to acquire English because these two languages are close to each other.
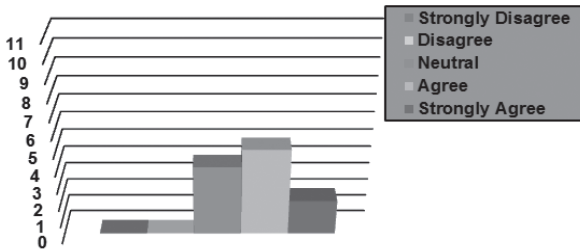

Here students generally think that Kurdish is a better supporter for them to learn English than Turkish language. 7 students out of 11 have agreed and 4 of them are neutral on this subject the most important point is that none of them disagree it, and this is an important result. When I have searched about the grammatical similarity between English and Kurdish I got these results; Both Ahmad (2008, pp. 98) and Amin (2004) agree on that there are four types of aspect: Simple, perfect, progressive and conditional. These aspects occur with the past and the present tenses. Kurdish does not have the perfect progressive aspect but instead it has the conditional aspect. And according to a study done by Saza Ahmed Fakhrie (2010) in both languages (Kurdish and English) the terms time, tense and aspect are closely interrelated. So we can say that learning English through Turkish is more difficult for Kurdish students and the 5th question of the questionnaire proves that.

**Graph 5. Learning English through English is difficult.**
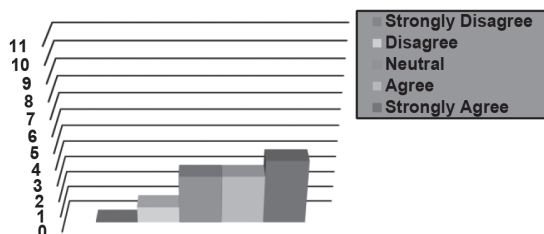
Most of the students think that learning English through Turkish is difficult for them. Accordingly, 7 students out of 11 students have difficulty learning English this way. This can explain their failure in English lesson. When I talked to our school's Turkish teacher about this fact, he said that the student didn't want to join Turkish lesson either. The reason for that can be explained by the graph below.

Graph 6. I feel more relaxed when I learn and study English through Kurdish
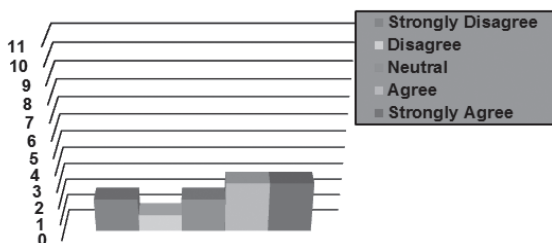
We can also have a reference to the foreign language anxiety which is the feeling of tension and being anxious when using a foreign language and Gardner, (1994) defines foreign language anxiety as the feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced by non-native speakers when learning or using a second or foreign language. These feelings may stem from any second language context whether associated with the productive skills of speaking and writing, or the receptive skills of reading and listening. When students learn L2, they get a level of stress because of the difference of the language. To get clear idea about let's check the 7th graph.

Graph 7. I feel more relaxed when I learn and study English through Turkish.
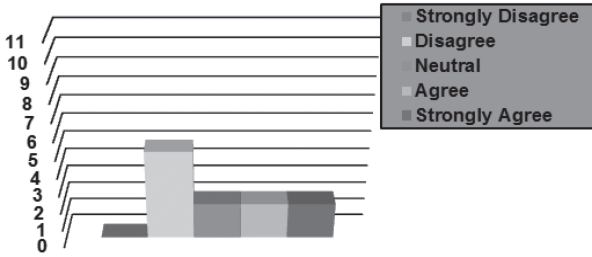

This chart shows that the majority of the students feel anxious when learn L3 through L2. For example, in my own classroom many of my students do not want to pronounce the words as English people do. Because they think it is funny or their friends pull their legs so they do not prefer to pronounce the words as they should be pronounced. In my classroom, the situation is more dissimilar in that my students mostly cannot pronounce even Turkish words well. Nevertheless, we teach them English through Turkish at which they are not very good. At this point, I can say that the level of anxiety is much more in classroom. According to the study by Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham. (2008) on adult multilingual, FLA (Foreign Language Anxiety) is linked to a myriad of interacting psychological, situational, cultural and social factors. Therefore, I can easily say that my students' FLA levels are much higher than the students who can speak Turkish as their mother language.

The results I got from face to face interview demonstrate the feelings of the students about a language in which they are not efficient. Two of the students say that when they speak Turkish, their friends tend to laugh at them or try to correct their mistakes or pronunciation errors   that's why ,they feel ashamed while speaking Turkish thus developing the feeling of not speaking Turkish during the lesson or not participating the lessons at all. When checking the exam results of the students participated in the research, we can clearly see that their success in comprehension of Turkish is not high at all. I found out that the main reason for the shyness, is the huge gap which they feel, when they talk to students having a reasonably good command over the English Language or listen to their peer group speaking fluently. The students are at a very impressionable age and they obviously would not like to end up as the laughing stock or get mocked or ridiculed by their classmates. According to the experts the fear of being ridiculed is known as Catagelophobia. Few people get through life without being mocked or teased, but most are confi-

dent enough to cope with it: for those with this phobia, being laughed at is one of the worst things that can happen to them. (2013)

**Graph 8. I sometimes cannot find the Turkish equivalence of an English word.**
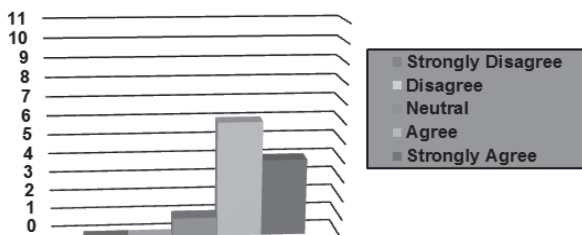
When looking at this chart I can say that nearly all students participating the questionnaire think that they have difficulty finding Turkish equivalence of an English word. Because the main problem is that their second language is Turkish not their native one so this leads to problem for them to find the Turkish equivalence of an English word.

Graph 9. I prefer to learn English through Turkish in English classes.
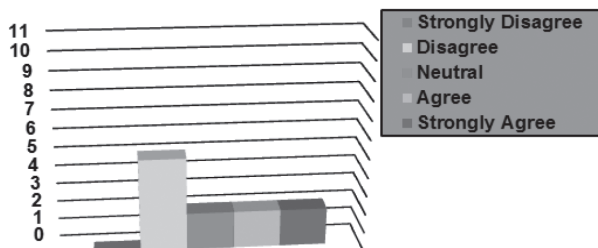
Five out of eleven students disagree with the idea of learning English through Turkish which is meaningful to show why they are not good at English.

Graph 10. I prefer to learn English through Kurdish in English classes.
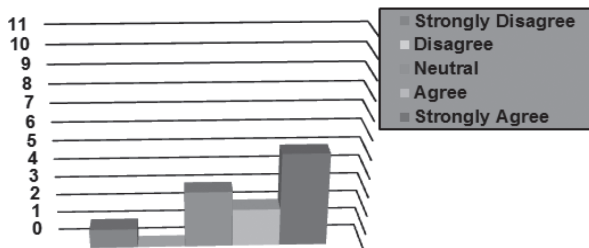
The students mostly (7 students out of 11 students) prefer to learn English through Kurdish and this is important fact to learn a language. Since motivation is really important to learn a language   It is thought that students who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people that speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used (Falk 1978). And related to the motivation, Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) have done pioneering work to explore the nature of motivation specific to language study. Gardner highlights two different types of motivation:

1) Instrumental motivation: the desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job, passing an examination, etc.

2) Integrative motivation: the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people from another culture that speak that language; the desire is also there to identify closely with the target language group. So students' preference to study a language is really crucial.

My students generally do not prefer study English through Turkish so they are not so motivated to learn English. Their Turkish competence is not satisfactory as that can be seen in the graph below. The results of Turkish examination. This exam includes 15 multiple choice comprehension questions and an essay writing question to evaluate the students' level in Turkish lesson.

As taking the Turkish examination into consideration, the grades students had are not satisfactory. The Academic Grading is based on a scale of 0-100 percent in Turkey and accordingly 8 students out of 11 got really low grades and that clearly shows that students are not good at Turkish lesson at all. Since they are not good at Turkish, they naturally do not want to learn something in Turkish. They could explain the low success at OSYM examination in Van or other eastern Cities.

4. CONCLUSION

When taking the results of the survey and my observations in consideration, I can conclude that the students in my classroom can have a better English competence provided that they learn English language through their native language. In education confidence, and motivation is really important to acquire the informa-

tion given and my research has also showed that when the students study with medium of their own native language they feel more relaxed. According to the statistics, the students mostly (7 students out of 11 students) prefer to learn English through Kurdish and again when look at survey, the majority of the students feel anxious while they are learning L3 through L2. (see Graph 7) and 7 students out of 11 students have difficulty learning English through L3 (see Graph 5) Therefore, learning L3 trough L1 can be regarded one of effective ways of teaching. The typological proximity between the L1 Kurdish and L3 English may play a significant a role for the Kurdish students in relation to English proficiency.

5. SUGGESTIONS

Due to constitutional and education regulations in Turkey, it is impossible to teach English through Kurdish in Turkey. That's why, to overcome the problems of teaching English to the students whose native language is not Turkish, we can use only English in classrooms, which may provide reinforcement for teaching English. To get better of this obstacle, I wanted my colleague who teaches Turkish lesson to make the students read more books to improve their Turkish. The typological proximity between the L1 Kurdish and L3 English could be facilitative, thus it should be studied more to get a clear idea about the effectiveness of teaching English through Kurdish.

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