

# The Impacts of Conscious and Planned Instruction to Overcome Mother Tongue Interference in the Learning of English Language: The Results of Quasi Experimental Study

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## Abstract

It is said that the student's use of MT (interference) in second/foreign language learning has negative influence on their learning and achievement. For this reason, solution should be given to the problem of mother tongue interference in the learning of foreign language. Hence, the main aim of this study was to experiment the impacts of conscious and planned instruction to overcome mother tongue interference in the learning of English language. To achieve the purpose of this study, quasi- experimental research design was used. For this particular study, Wolayita Liqa and Wolayita Soddo Preparatory Schools were selected. Then, students of grade 11B at wolayita Liqa and grade 11T at Wolayita Soddo Preparatory Schools were selected for the study. Next, homeroom teachers of Grade 11B and 11T both at Wolayita Liqa and Wolayita Soddo Preparatory Schools respectively were allowed to pick the rolled paper as lotto. Accordingly, the experimental and controlled groups were made. In this study, students in the experimental group were given conscious and planned instruction to check whether or not it is possible to overcome the interference of mother tongue in the learning of English as foreign language. A total of 150 minutes instruction was conducted in the experimental class. After the instruction, the students in both groups were given the speaking test. Then the, results of both controlled and experimental group were compared and contrasted to see the group who performed better in the test. The analysis of data shows that the pronunciation of students are in controlled group on the four sounds are not equal. When we compare the result of experimental and controlled group, the students in the experimental group pronounced the words containing 'B', 'P', 'F' and 'V' sounds more than the students in the controlled group. This implies that students of experimental group performed better than students of the controlled group. This could be because of the intervention and the conscious and planned formal instruction provided to students in the experimental group. Thus, it is possible to overcome the interference through conscious instruction. It was found that the intervention had a positive effect on the MT interference in the learning of English speaking skill. This was proved through the higher scores that the experimental group obtained in the post-test. Finally, recommendations were given based on the conclusions and findings of the study.

**Keywords:** Conscious, English Language, Interference, Learning, Mother Tongue, planned instruction

## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

According to Stulajterova (2007), today, there is a great deal of emphasis on the study of English language. The ability to speak English language is no longer merely an advantage- it is becoming a necessity. As a result, linguists and methodologists are looking for more effective approaches to English language teaching. One of the suggested methods is the use of mother tongues to teach English. Besides, students mother tongue can interfere in the learning of foreign or second language. However, the use of mother tongue can support or affect the learning of English language depending on how it is used. In other words, the use of native language can support or affect the learning of English language depending on how it is used.

Various arguments have been given for prohibiting the use of students' mother tongue in the learning of English as foreign language or second language. The first and most common argument is that using mother tongue might negatively affect students' learning process because it reduces the exposure learners get to the target language and reduces their opportunities for using the target language (TL) Bull turn, (2001, Deller ; Rinvoluceri; 2002). In other words, mother tongue use will prevent the teacher providing maximum chance for the target language. This argument is usually strengthened with the idea that English Foreign Language learners often have little or no exposure to the target language outside the classroom.

Besides, student's use Mother Tongue (MT henceforth) (interference) in second/foreign language (hereafter SL/FL) learning has negative influence. It is often felt that teachers and students overuse mother tongue. The excessive use of MT makes the learners not to use English language as they are expected to use. The learner first language interference can affect the learning of second or foreign language. With this regard, Cook (2001) stated that interference is a major source of difficulty in the learning of English speaking skill.

Accordingly, it is argued that teachers should not spend this valuable classroom time using mother tongue. In agreement to this view, Auerbach (1993:14) indicates that "the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn as they learn and use English, they will internalize it and begin to think in English. Hence, Cook (2001) argues that the analogue to mother tongue acquisition is simply beside the point.

According to him, the nature of MT acquisition is fundamentally different from SL/FL learning. These differences affect students learning when they attempt to use the MT in FL/SL learning.

In general, it is said that the student's use of MT (interference) in second/foreign language learning has negative influence on their learning and achievement. For this reason, solution should be given to the problem of mother tongue interference in the learning of foreign language. Hence, the main aim of this study was to experiment the impacts of conscious and planned instruction to overcome mother tongue interference in the learning of English language.

## 2. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Singaravelu (2010) pointed that "MT interference misguides students in grammar, sentence pattern and word order". The interference of MT resulted on the formation of error while students are learning L<sub>2</sub>. With this regard, Corder(1987:65) noted that in the course of learning a second language, learners will produce utterances which are ungrammatical or otherwise ill-formed, when judged by the generally accepted rules of the language they are learning. Hence, it can be said that MT can interfere with the learning of SL/FL and the interference can result in error formation during SL/FL learning.

Ethiopia is the home of numerous people who belong to different ethnic groups and speak various languages. Currently, in Ethiopia people live in nine administrative regions and two city administration. One of these is the Southern, People, Nations and Nationalities Regional Government. It is said that more than 56 Nations and Nationalities lived in the Southern Ethiopia Region. Wolayita People is one of the peoples who are living in the region. They speak their own language Known as Wolayita Language. The language is widely spoken in Wolayita, Gamu, Gofa, Konta, Dawuro and other neighboring zones with different accent and dialect.

In Ethiopia English serves two main purposes. First, it serves as a medium of communication in different international organization such as UN, AU, ECA etc. Second, in Ethiopia, English serves as a language of instruction (LOI) at primary, high and preparatory schools as well as at higher institutions. Therefore, learners should develop their English Language skills and knowledge to be successful in their academic career and future job. However, one of the people for Wolayita language learners is the interference of their mother tongue while students are learning English as speaking skill. The interference of MT distorts the intended meaning in the target language or English language. Hence, let's see how Wolayita language interferes in the leaning of English speaking skill.

For example, some native speakers of Wolayita language sound 'P' for 'F' and 'B' for 'V' and the like. This distorts the intended meaning in the target language or English language. For illustration, we can see the following expressions by some Wolayita language native speakers to reveal the patters of interference and to divulge how meaning is affected due to MT interference.

### A. Exchange of "F" with "P"

1. There are **four** students in the class.
2. You are as **fast** as an airplane.
3. Save yourself and others **from** car accident by decreasing the **pace**.
4. Our bank is **fast** and simple.

Because of the interference of MT, speakers of Wolayita language exchange 'F' with 'P' while speaking the above sentences in English language. So that the above sentences can be pronounced as:

1. There are **poor** students in the class.
2. You are as **past** as an airplane.
3. Save yourself and others **prom** car accident by decreasing the **face**.
4. Our bank is **past** and **simple**.

### B. Exchange of "V" with "B"

The following examples also show the pattern of exchanging 'V' with 'B' due to MT interference:

1. Would you make your **voice** loud? Because I couldn't hear you.
2. Including **vat** soft drinks cost about 10 birr.
3. In this room, we need **vent**. Because it is too hot.

Due to the interference of MT, speakers of Wolayita language exchange 'V' with 'B' and the sounds in the above sentences can be pronounced as:

1. Would you make your **boys** loud? Because I couldn't hear you.
2. Including **bat**, soft drinks cost about 10 birr.
3. In this room, we need **bent**. Because it is too hot.

As the above examples reveal, the meaning that the speaker intended to transmit is distorted because of the interference of MT. For instance, in the first example, the speaker wants to tell the number of the students that exist in the classroom. But because of the MT influence the speaker pronounce "F" as "P". As the result, the word is pronounced as "**poor**". And the message became opposite to what is intended. Similarly, due to the exchange of "V" for "B" as the first example shows, the speaker wanted to say sound. But because of Wolayita

MT interference “V” is pronounced as “B” and the word “voice” is pronounced as “**boys**”. This indicates that MT interference distorts the intended meaning of the speaker. Thus, for effective instruction of foreign language instruction and to help students to transmit the message they intended to communicate, attention should be given on how to overcome the problem of mother tongue interference in the learning of foreign language. Accordingly, this study was designed to assess the impacts of conscious and planned instruction to overcome mother tongue interference in the learning of foreign language. That is, the main objective of this study was to explain whether or not it is possible to overcome Wolayita language interference through conscious and planned formal instruction. To do so, the following detail methodology was employed.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Setting**

For this particular study, Wolayita Liqa and Wolayita Soddo Preparatory Schools were selected. Wolayita Liqa School was launched in 2000 E.C. Before that, this school served as second cycle primary school. It started education with 122 male and 66 female students, 1 female teacher and 26 male teachers and two school principals. Currently, it has 514 total numbers of students (411 male students and 103 female students) 29 male teachers and 1 female teacher and two principals, one for second cycle primary school and one for preparatory school. Including 24 administrative and support workers, the total number of staff members is 54. Wolayita Liqa School is located in South Nation Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, Wolayita zone particularly in Wolayita Soddo town. It was located 395 km from Addis Ababa. The school is selected as research setting for this study.

Besides, Wolayita Soddo Preparatory (Mesenado) School was selected as a research setting. Wolayita Soddo Mesenado or Soddo Preparatory School was launched in 1963 E.C as Soddo Kelemna Mesenaddo School. In 1993 the school incorporated a preparatory school with the high school. Currently the school continued preparatory school independently with two faculties. They are social science faculty and natural science faculty. Total number of students who are attending social science faculty are 473. (176 male and 297 female students). In the natural science faculty the total number of students is 1067. Among those 601 are male and 466 are female.

Currently, the school has 114 total number of staff members (102 male including 3 principals and 12 female teachers). Wolayita Soddo Preparatory School is located in South Nation Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, Wolayita zone particularly in Wolayita Soddo town. It is located 395 km from Addis Ababa.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

The main purpose of this research was to explore whether intervention of a teacher has an impact on reducing the interference of mother tongue (MT) in the learning of English speaking skill. To achieve the purpose of this study, quasi- experimental research design was used. Because quasi experimental research design is used in natural settings and some control over the experimental condition can be possible.

In both Wolayita Liqa and Soddo Preparatory Schools, complete control over the school schedule and time allotment was not possible. But it was possible to conduct a study on the students following the school schedule. That is why the quasi-experimental research design was selected. The study was experimental in that the students in grade 11 were assigned into controlled and experimental groups. Besides, the experimental group received special treatment from the English language teacher. After the intervention of the teacher, it was checked whether intervention of the teacher had an impact on minimizing the interference of MT in the learning of English speaking skill.

#### **3.3. Participants of the Study: Experimental and Controlled Groups**

In this study, students of grade 11B at Wolayita Liqa and grade 11T at Wolayita Soddo Preparatory Schools were selected for the study. The students were assumed to be at similar language level (have almost similar language ability). There were also students who were from rich and poor family, from educated and uneducated family. But it was assumed that the participants of this study share similarities in various aspects including their use of Wolayita language. This is often the case since students are naturally organized in groups as classes within schools are considered to share similar characteristics (Best & Khan, 1995). It was also observed that in both sections there is an interference of MT in the learning of English speaking skill.

After selecting one section of grade 11 students in each school, the researcher assigned them randomly to control or experimental group. One section was assigned to experimental group and the other section was assigned to the controlled group. To do this, two pieces of paper were prepared and on one of it the word experimental was written and on the other the word controlled was written. Finally, homeroom teachers of Grade 11B and 11T both at Wolayita Liqa and Wolayita Soddo Preparatory Schools respectively were allowed to pick the rolled paper as lotto. Accordingly, the experimental and controlled groups were made.

Next, there was teacher’s intervention in the experimental group. That was, English language teacher provided special treatment to the students in the experimental group. He taught them how the interference of MT

influences FL learning by providing practical examples. Grade 11T English teacher at Mesenado School also made them practices peaking. However, no treatment was given for the students in the controlled group. Next, a brief explanation of the intervention was given under teacher intervention.

### **3.4. Procedures of Classroom Intervention**

**The following procedure was followed to carry out intervention:**

1. Asking the consent of the English language teacher who was teaching grade 11T at Wolayita Soddo Preparatory School. He was informed about the intervention and how to do it. After creating awareness about the intervention, he was asked whether he is volunteer to carry out the intervention or not.
2. Preparing detail explanation on how MT interference affects the learning of English speaking skill and problems created in the understanding of the intended message. This was prepared by referring to literature written on the topic. Arguments and logical explanation will be included in the discussion.
3. Giving detail elaboration to English language teacher of grade 11T on the problems created due to the interference of MT. This was done by the researcher since she was an interested body in the area. Explanation and different examples were given during discussion to clarify the issue. Besides the note prepared on this topic was given to the teacher to help him to have good understanding on the topic. After giving detail elaboration, the teacher was asked whether he understood the topic or not. Adequate and convincing explanation was given. Practical examples were given on how the interference of Wolayita language affects expressing and understanding the target message in English, foreign language to Ethiopia. The examples were prepared by the researcher on the common areas of interference. This was done by grouping the interference into two categories. For example, exchange of 'P' for 'F' and vice versa and exchange of 'B' for 'V' and vice versa. This was made to equip English language teachers with necessary information and knowledge on the topic.
4. English language teacher was informed about schedule as to when to carry out the intervention and the total time needed for the intervention.
5. The total time of the intervention was also calculated and informed to the teacher. The intervention was done for 30 minutes each day. This was made five times per week. In one week there was  $30 \times 5 = 150$  minutes for intervention. The intervention was made for two months or eight weeks. This means the total minutes for the intervention was  $8 \times 150 = 1200$  minutes. This was equals to 20hours. It was assumed that 20hours were enough to minimize interference of MT in the learning of English speaking skill. The total minutes for the intervention is more than half of the time allotted to cover one credit course in higher institution. However, the intervention is small to improve the common patterns of Wolayita language interference in learning English language.
6. *Teaching the experimental students about the problems of MT interference in expressing and understanding of EFL.*
7. Speaking activities were designed and formulated for classroom practice. This was done by the researchers. The activities were made on the common interference areas. The researcher prepared a series of activities that were used in the 8 week intervention time. The activities started showing the wrong or misuse of sounds and how it causes problem. These activities were prepared to make the students practice the correct use of the sounds.
8. The designed activities were given to the teacher and the teacher made the students practice them for 8 weeks. The researcher observed while the teacher was undertaking the intervention.
9. Tests were prepared and administered to students in both experimental and control groups to see the impact of the intervention. The intervention was made between January 2015 and March 2015. To compensate the time used for intervention, the teacher was told to give make up classes.

### **3.5. Tools of Data collection**

Classroom observation and test were used to collect necessary data.

#### **A. Classroom Observation**

Observation was used as a tool to elicit the data needed for this study. Classroom observation was made to describe how the teacher is carrying out the intervention or to assess how special treatment is given to the students. It was also employed to describe how students were practicing the speaking skill to overcome the MT influence. Besides, observation was used to assess if teacher's intervention brings differences between controlled and experimental group.

In addition, both controlled and experimental groups were observed while they were taking speaking test. This was to see if there is any difference between the two after the intervention as well as to observe how the students sound the words with 'P', 'F', 'B' and 'V' both in English and Wolayita language. The classroom observation was made according to a specific checklist that was prepared ahead of observation. The researcher took detail notes during the classroom observation. And that helped to describe the things taking place in the



classroom.

After the end of each week classroom observation, the researcher asked the English teacher about student's participation in the intervention and the challenges and opportunities he was facing during the intervention. This was done to check the progress of students.

### C. Test

Speaking test was designed and administered to both controlled and experimental groups of students. The major goal of the test was to assess the impact of the teacher's intervention on MT interference. It was used to check whether the teacher's intervention helped the experimental group minimize their mother tongue interference while speaking FL. The test was also intended to describe if there was any difference between controlled and experimental groups on the interference of MT after the experimental group received special treatment. Regarding the test, words that show interference were written in separate sheet of paper and students were asked to read words aloud. While students were pronouncing the words the researcher checked whether the students pronounced the words correctly or not in both languages.

After the students were given the speaking test, the test was corrected by the researchers and the teacher who carry out the intervention program. Then, the numbers of correct responses from each group were added together to get the average result of the two groups. Finally, the results of both controlled and experimental groups were compared and contrasted to see the group who performed better in the test. The result of test analysis is presented in the next section.

## 4. Result and Discussion

In this study students in the experimental group were given conscious and planned instruction to check whether or not it is possible to overcome the interference mother tongue in the learning of English as a foreign language. A total of 150 minutes instruction was conducted in the experimental class. After the instruction, the students were given the speaking test. Then the results of both controlled and experimental groups were compared and contrasted to see the group who performed better in the test. Below is the result of test analysis.

**Table 1: Correct and Incorrect Results of Experimental and Controlled Groups in Pronouncing the words Containing "P" and "F" Sounds : The Result of Speaking Test**

No	Sounds	Groups			
		Experimental Group		Controlled Group	
		Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1	P	29(96.7%)	1(3.33%)	24(80%)	6(20%)
2	F	29(96.7%)	1(3.33%)	21(70%)	9(30%)

As can be seen in table 1 item 1, among 30 students who received special treatment in the experimental group, 29(96.7%) students correctly pronounced the words with containing both 'P' and 'F' sounds. This shows that the number of students who correctly sounded the words with both 'P' and 'F' are equal. However, only one student in experimental group pronounced the words containing both 'P' and 'F' sounds incorrectly. From this test result, it can be concluded that the conscious and planned formal instruction provided to students via intervention brought a change with the exception of one student who pronounced it incorrectly.

Besides, the table shows the results of controlled group in the case of the words having 'P' and 'F' sounds. According to the result of 30 students in the controlled group, 24(80%) students correctly pronounced the words with 'P'. However, 6(20%) students from the controlled group pronounced the words containing 'P' sounds incorrectly. When we compare these results with students in the experimental group, there is a difference. That is, only one student in experimental group and 6(20%) students from the controlled group pronounced the words containing both 'P' and 'F' sounds incorrectly. This implies that students of experimental group performed better than students of the controlled group. This could be because of the intervention and the conscious and planned formal instruction provided to students in the experimental group.

It was expected that students in the controlled group could perform very less as compared to the students in the experimental group. However, the above result on the pronouncing of the words containing 'P' sounds is opposite to what is expected. This may be unlike 'F' the letter 'P' is commonly occurs in Wolayita language at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of a word. For example; '*Paraa*' (P sound in the beginning of a word, (horse) '*Ussuppuniya*' (P sound in the middle of a word (February), and '*lelep*' (P sound in the end of a word,) (getting weak and weak). Such occurrences of words containing 'P' sounds in Wolayita language might help the controlled group students pronounce the words with 'P' correctly.

Table 1 item 2 shows test result of pronouncing the words that containing sound 'F.' Among 30 students in the controlled group, 21(70%) of them pronounced the words containing 'F' sounds correctly and 9 students pronounced it incorrectly. The students in the experimental group(96.7%) pronounced correctly the words containing the 'F' sound. It appears that the experimental students performed better than the students in the controlled group. From this test result, it can be concluded that the conscious and planned formal instruction

provided to students via intervention brought a change in the interference of mother tongue in the learning of foreign language. But it appears that the students in the experimental group performed more than the expected. This may be because although the ‘F’ sound doesn’t happen at the beginning and end of Wolayita language, it happens in the middle of some Wolayita language. For instance, see the following words *Ofinta* (Springtime), *uddufuniya* (May), *ifitta* (Local door) and *afutta* (tear), in these words ‘F’ sound appears in the middle in the words of Wolayita language. This might helped the students in the controlled group to score more than the expected result of the speaking test.

**Table 2: Correct and Incorrect Results of Experimental and Controlled Groups in Pronouncing the Words Containing ‘B’ and ‘V’ Sounds : The Result of Speaking Test**

No	Sounds	Groups			
		Experimental Group		Controlled Group	
		Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1	B	30(100%)	0	30(100%)	0
2	V	30(100%)	0	5(15%)	25(75%)

Item 1 and 2 of table 2 shows the data from experimental and controlled groups regarding correct and incorrect pronunciation of the words containing ‘B’ and ‘V’. Accordingly, 30(100%)students who received the treatment pronounced the words containing ‘B’ and ‘V’ sounds correctly. This data revealed that, although it is difficult for Wolayita language native speakers to pronounce the sound ‘V’, through the intervention, all of the students in experimental group pronounced it correctly. This implies that it is possible to overcome the interference mother lounge in the learning of English as foreign language.

Table 2(See item 1) depicted that 30(100%) students controlled group the or all the students in controlled group correctly pronounced the words containing ‘B’ sound . This shows that all Wolayita language native speakers have no difficulty of pronouncing words having the sound ‘B’ as it exists in Wolayita language in all positions. However, Wolayita language native speakers have difficulty to pronounce the sound ‘V’. The reason for this difficulty is that sound ‘V’ doesn’t exist in Wolayita language in any position. This may be the reason why, 25(75%) students in the controlled group pronounced the words with ‘V’ sound wrongly. 5(15%) students in the controlled group pronounced the words containing the V’ sound.

## 5. Findings of the Study

Generally, from the above analysis the following findings were obtained. The pronunciation of students are in controlled group on the four sounds are not equal . It was revealed that the data from experimental group, regarding correct and incorrect pronunciation of ‘B’ and ‘V’, students who received the treatment pronounced the words with ‘B’ and ‘V’ correctly. This also shows that, although it is difficult for Wolayita language native speakers to pronounce the sound ‘V’, through the intervention, total number of the students in experimental group pronounced it correctly. So it can be said that it is possible to overcome the interference of Wolayita MT in the learning of English speaking skill. This shows that, the intervention brought a great difference between controlled and experimental group.

Wolayita language native speakers have difficulty to pronounce the sound ‘V’. The reason for this difficulty is that sound ‘V’ doesn’t exist in Wolayita language in any position. This may be the reason why, the majority 25(75%) of the students in the controlled group pronounced the words with ‘V’ sound wrongly The great majority of students who received conscious and planned instruction pronounced words containing ‘B’ ,’P’ ‘F’ and ‘V’ sounds . So we can conclude that it is possible to overcome the interference of Wolayita MT in the learning of English speaking skill. This shows that, the intervention brought a great change between controlled and experimental group.

## 6. Conclusions

This study intended to prove or disprove whether it is possible or not to overcome the interference mother lounge in the learning of English as foreign language. When we compare the result of experimental and controlled group, the students in the experimental group pronounced the words containing ‘B’ ,’P’ ‘F’ and ‘V’ sounds more than the students in the controlled group. This implies that students of experimental group performed better than students of the controlled group. This could be because of the intervention and the conscious and planned formal instruction provided to students in the experimental group. Thus, it is possible to overcome the interference through conscious instruction. It was found that the intervention had a positive effect on the MT interference in the learning of English speaking skill. This was proved through the higher scores that the experimental group obtained in the post-test.

## 7. Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions of the study it seems reasonable to forward the following

recommendations.

1. As it has been found in the study, the sound 'V' never happen in Wolayita language. So, some Wolayita language native speakers can't pronounce the sound correctly. Rather they substitute it with 'B'. However, after the treatment they could be able to pronounce it correctly. So, teachers should consciously get the students to practice the sound while teaching speaking skill. As it was found in the study, in Wolayita language sound F doesn't exist at the end and beginning of any word. But it happens in the middle of some words in Wolayitalanguage. However, due lack of consideration for the distorted meaning they transmit, students are not given special treatment to avoid the problem.
2. So, teachers should focus on speaking skill to give treatment concerning the sounds ('V' 'F' and 'P'). Because when they use writing skill, they are conscious to use sounds.
3. The teachers' treatment regarding the above letters should be free from any negative treatment. Rather it should be positive and students should be reinforced concerning the issue so as to avoid the students' anxiety, fear and stress while using the language skill.
4. English language teachers should not spend their valuable time in the classroom using mother tongue. Because the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will be free from their MT interference and, they will internalize English language and begin to think in English.
5. Teachers should get the students to know exchange of 'F' for 'P' and 'V' for 'B' is not the gap of Knowledge but it is lack of practice.
6. Since this is the first research concerning Wolayita MT interference with special reference of exchange of 'F' for 'P' and 'V' for 'B', is limited in terms of skill and participants. Further research should be conducted widely by completing all the gaps in this study.

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