

## **SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ITS PSYCHO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Bilingualism or multilingualism may imply socioeconomic advantages. But a further literature study indicates that this may also affect psychological and cultural viewpoints. The acquisition of second language would significantly influence the mentality or perceptual framework of the language users. Consequently, this finding may inspire to the appropriate pedagogical methods in language acquisition.*

### **1. Introduction**

Today many people are attempting to master more than one language. It is undeniable that acquiring two or more languages may gain some benefits. Being a bilingualist or multilingualist would imply social and economical advantages. They would be commonly regarded as a group of people that has higher social status since the acquisition of other language requires a tremendous effort. A part from that, this skill may bring on an income or extra income if the possessors apply it in particular occupations such as interpreters, translators, or language teachers. Moreover, in this article I would like to argue that second language acquisition also implies the acquisition of the second world view. Then I will try to reveal how it happens. Furthermore, some suggestions on pedagogical methods to assist in the process of second language acquisition are presented.

### **2. Language, Culture, and Cognition**

O'Grady et al. (1997) defined language as "a system of communication, a medium for thought, a vehicle for literary expression, a social institution, a matter for political controversy, a catalyst for nation building" (p.1). Human beings as the users of language have skill and capacity in accepting input, manipulating, and then producing information about phenomenon in the world. The process of producing words, arranging them into grammatical order that eventually form a unit that contains meaning involves cognitive means.

Similarly, culture deals with the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. Kessing (1979) stated "a culture is, in a cognitive sense, a system of knowledge, a composite of the cognitive systems more or less shared by members of a society." (p.13) Both language and

culture share a general idea, i.e. a system associated with cognition.

In terms of cognition, different cultures and languages, to some extent, may indicate different procedure of obtaining knowledge and comprehending through line of thinking, skills, experience, and the sensory faculty. Kessing (1979) provided an evident of a particular phenomenon that is viewed differently by people from different cultures. He stated “In, culture after culture, one’s predecessors are viewed as having gone ahead (“before”) along a line of march we are following, and one’s life experiences are seen as having “left behind” (“past” = passed). Kwaio culture permutes this model by conceptualizing the time periods associated with those who has gone before (*ta?a I na?o* ‘people in front’) as being in front of and downward from the present”(p.31). This evidence supports the idea that different cultures may have different point of view of the same phenomenon.

Another authentication of different cognition of culture and language variance can be observed from a linguistic feature. In this case, the mind-as-body metaphor (referred to Kessing’s term) can be another hint of how people as users of a language perceive phenomenon in the world. For example, to express that a child is intelligent or clever, English will say *the child is bright*. Meanwhile, Indonesian will say *anak itu otaknyanya encer* (the child’s brain is liquid/watery). English views cleverness as like light, but Indonesian regards it as fluid. The two differences of the use of body metaphor may point

out that they have different perception on the same phenomenon.

To sum up, a language and culture may indicate a particular way of thinking. People from the same language and culture are likely to have the same cognition. They will probably have similar perception and feeling on phenomena in the world. On the contrary, users of different languages and cultures may differ in expressing the phenomena in the world. It is strongly influenced by their ways of thinking.

### **3. Second Language Acquisition and Cultural Norms**

The previous section may lead an idea that the mastery of a certain language may reflect the possession of knowledge on the culture that involves cognition of the people as the users of the language itself. It means that the process of language acquisition implies a transferring of culture. Lyons (1981) stipulated “the process of language acquisition is such that the biological transmission of whatever is universal in language is also dependent, for its success, upon the process of cultural transmission” (p.322). Biological transmission refers to the genetically transmitted faculties of human mind. The latter means a system of knowledge and the cognitive systems. The two elements play an important rule in the acquisition of first language.

Cultural transmission has more emphasis in the language acquisition. Some features in linguistic such as lexical and grammar may involve cultural entities. A word in a language can represent the perception of the

language users on the sign or phenomenon that is represented. Similarly, the perception of the language users on gender can be seen from the unit of grammar they use. For example, determiners in some languages distinguish an object by attributing different determiners of gender. Therefore, the acquisition of a language naturally will imply the acquisition of its culture. Lyons (1981) stated that "If competence in a particular language implies the ability to produce and understand sentences of that language, then it is unquestionably a part of culture: i.e. social knowledge" (p.323)

Furthermore, it is summarized that full understanding of the several kinds of meaning that are encoded in the grammar and vocabulary of a language comes only with a full understanding of the culture, or cultures, in which it operates (Lyons, 1981). It means that one cannot be regarded as having competence in a language if he or she has no comprehension on its culture. On the contrary, one who has competence in more than one language should possess more knowledge on culture. This is a consequence of second language acquisition that requires the acquisition of cultural norms that exist in the target language.

The cultural norms may reflect the cognition of the people in the target language, and the cultural script of the second language. The norms include some notions in interaction that deals with content and form. The interactional norms naturally bear some aspects of culture that exist in a community or nation. Liddicoat and Crozet (2001) studied the conversation of Australian

students as second language learners of French on a particular topic. The learners were asked to make a conversation initiated by 'Did you have a good weekend?' Liddicoat and Crozet found that the typical talk of French did not appear since the subjects did not have knowledge of interactional norms in French culture. This happened as the consequence of different interactional norms between two cultures. Liddicoat and Crozet (2001) as cited in Beal study (1992) revealed that Australians perceive that the question does not have any purpose of finding detail information from their partner of talk, but French see it as the question that needs detailed answer. Australians tend to give facts rather than opinion while French prefer to give detail explanation including opinions. Dealing with conversational style or form Australian do not interrupt the person who is talking, but French do. This study has argued that differences in conversational style are linked to problems and misunderstandings in both intracultural and intercultural interactions.

Liddicoat and Crozet's study supports the idea that second language acquisition should involve the acquisition of the culture as to succeed in the process of communication. Since culture reflects cognition or the perception of how people in a community view the signs or phenomena in the world, second language acquisition implicates the acquisition of another world view. Therefore, in this context a bilingualist or multilingualists should have benefit by gaining such awareness.

#### **4. The Pedagogical Method**

The introduction of culture to second language learners could be problematic. The learning goal would become clouded or lost by the emphasis on culture. To avoid such a deviation occurs, there should be an appropriate method or methods to teach the cultural norms. Crozet (1996) proposed a method in transferring cultural or interactional norm to second language learners. The method includes the activity that is divided into four phases: awareness-raising phase, experimentation phase, production phase, and feedback phase.

The awareness-raising phase involves second language learners to identify a short list of stereotypes about people's learners and people of the target language. Naturally the learners identify negative stereotypes of the two cultures. Then the teacher suggests that stereotyping frequently results from misunderstanding the different cultural norms speakers used in different countries to communicate with each other. Learners are asked to answer a question in the learners' language context then find out the equivalent answer in the target language. This activity is aimed to show that the answer cannot be easily translated from one language to another without knowing the appropriate cultural norms in the target language. The typical answers along with the explanation are provided at the end of this phase.

In the experimentation phase, the teacher let the learners engage in a multimedia task based on unscripted videotaped conversation between two

native speakers of the target language. Then the learners are asked to reconstruct the correct sequence of the scrambled-order conversation, and to recognize the norms of interaction that had been brought to their attention during the awareness-raising phase.

After this phase, the learners conducted role-plays of a conversation on fictitious similar topic using appropriate target language norms of interaction. During this production phase the learners' role-plays are watched by the others or they can be videotaped. Finally, in the feedback phase the learners comment each other about the conversation they have done. The discussion is established and eventually this lead to the understanding that learning to speak in a foreign language is not a matter of simply adopting foreign norms of behaviour, but about finding an acceptable accommodation between one's first culture and the target culture.

Lidicoat and Crozet found that the learners who have undergone these phases for ten weeks showed the acquisition of the cultural norm or interactional norms for both contents and form. Although this acquisition of form tended to lose after one-year completion of the instruction, but the contents still remained.

Similarly, another method of transferring cultural norms through second language learning is by giving the learners a chance to observe directly the behaviour of the target language native speakers. This method is called behaviouristic learning. La Forge (1983) recommended that "progress in second language acquisition took place in a

significantly different way from behaviouristic learning” (p.113)

These studies recommend us that both pedagogical methods can be appropriate to transfer cultural norms to second language (L2) learners. At the same time, it means that this pedagogical method introduce the cognition of native speakers in the target language to the L2 learners. As the result, the L2 learners not only gain the acquisition of the second language, but also the acquisition of second world view.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the acquisition of a language gains a benefit to have knowledge of how people in the target language perceive and express a phenomenon. The acquisition of more than one language may involve the acquisition of cultural norms in the target language. In the other words, this acquisition may lead on the understanding of cognitive process in the target language. Therefore, if one expresses a phenomenon in another language it means that he or she unconsciously attempts to see it from other's point of view. In the other words, the acquisition of second language implies the acquisition of the second world view. Considering the benefit of the second language acquisition, an implication on education of second language that explores cultural norms of the target language should be conducted. Pedagogical methods that involve *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*. Longman: London

awareness raising phase, experimentation phase, production phase, feedback phase, and behaviouristic learning are proved to be affective in reaching the purpose.

## 6. References

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