In the Name of God

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The Role of Language Learning Identity in Willingness to Communicate among Iranian EFL Learners

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

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In the Name of God

The Most Merciful

The Most Compassionate

Dedication

To my life-long teachers

My Dear Parents and Professors

Abstract

Poststructuralists in the field of SLA have been trying to understand what identity is, how it relates to a larger society, and most importantly how it affects one's language learning process. MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued that the ultimate goal of second or foreign language learning should be to "engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them" (p. 547). The major purpose of this study is to investigate any probable effect of the students' developing Language Learning Identity (LLI) on their foreign language (FL) Willingness to Communicate (WTC). In doing so, the LLI of students at intermediate and advanced levels have been investigated and later compared to the degree of their WTC. The participants of the study were 250 male and 250 female students at intermediate and advanced levels studying at Iran Language Institute (ILI) and 20 students (12 female and 8 male) studying ESP at the Iran University of Science and Technology(IUST). LLI questionnaire was one of the instruments used in this study which was developed by the researcher and the other one was WTC questionnaire adapted from MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Conrod (2001). Furthermore an interview was conducted with 20 ESP students at IUST to provide complementary information about the factors that would lead to more enhanced identity and WTC variables or factors that would diminish it. The obtained results were analyzed. Both male and female participants at

advanced levels of language learning possessed *foreign language (FL) identity*. A chi-square analysis was run to compare the subjects' Willingness to Communicate based on LLI. The findings point to this fact that participants with *high (FL) identity* are the ones who are *more willing to communicate in English.* Nevertheless, Iranian EFL learners desire to assimilate the foreign culture only up to the extent that the foreign culture and identity arising from it aid the process of foreign language learning and not more.

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Although my name appears on the cover of this thesis, I could not have done this alone and might even have withdrawn from the study prior to its completion if it had not been for the wonderful people who supported me in this effort.

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I am also highly grateful to the heads and managers of Iran Language Institute (ILI) who permitted the researcher to collect data at Tajrish (male) and Golbarg (female) branch. Here again I would like to thank Dr.Vaezi for

giving the researcher the opportunity to conduct interviews with her ESP students at Iran University of Science and Technology (IUST).

I would like to honestly offer my heartfelt thanks to my husband who patiently bore with me to finish this thesis and without whose encouragement I would have most probably stopped half through the way.

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List of Abbreviations

CA: Communication Anxiety

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELL: English Language Learner

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

FL: Foreign Language

IL: Inter language

ILI: Iran Language Institute

IUST: Iran University of Science and Technology

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

LLI: Language Learning Identity

SCT: Self-Categorization Theory

SIT: Social Identity Theory

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

SPCC: Self-Perceived Communicative Competence

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

WTC: Willingness to Communicate

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background

Psychosocial theory of personality development shows that one of the major developmental tasks concerning late adolescence is the formation of a stable and coherent sense of self-identity. The construction of young people's identities is dependent on the context of other developmental demands and role transitions typical of their age, such as those related to future education, peer and intimate relationships and occupation. (Erikson, 1968; Havighujrst, 1948, cited in Berzonsky et al, 1999).

With a shift of focus from a psycholinguistic to a more comprehensive social and anthropological view towards language and linguistics, educators and researchers have become more interested in the issue of language identity. These researchers have investigated the diverse social, historical, and cultural contexts in which language learning takes place and how learners deal with the plethora of positions those contexts offer them. According to Norton (2006) it is now believed that language is more than a system of signs; it is a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated.

Freud was one of the pioneers who made use of the term "identity". He tried to examine inner identity for formulating an implicit concept that emphasized race and religion and concentrated on preparation for the life

more than the present life which was empty of prejudice and was thoroughly logical. Identity theorists can be considered as a group of "Ego" psychological theorists whose main goal was to examine the effect of some aspects of social and psychological environment of "Ego" and its development and performance. In this regard, we can refer to the theories of Erickson, Glasser, Kegan, Blos, Lovenger, Kolberg, Morcia, Adams, and Berzonsky (Ghasemi, 2005).

Nowadays in modern language pedagogy communication, the functional nature of which has been related to a variety of individual and contextual characteristics, has got a great emphasis. Cultivation of the communicative competence as Canale and Swain (1980) believed is one of the significant goals in modern language teaching and learning. By the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, classroom organization had been "increasingly characterized by authenticity, real-world simulation, and meaningful tasks" (Brown, 2001: 42). The traditional teacher fronted classes have been replaced by more teacher-student and student-student interaction. Therefore, learners' willingness "to talk in order to learn" (Skehan, 1989: 48) is a crucial factor in second language acquisition (SLA).

The concept of "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) was originally developed by McCroskey and associates (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, 1990, 1991), as a personality-based, trait-

like predisposition that individuals display in first language (L1) communication. MacIntyre and associates applied the WTC construct which can be roughly defined as the intention to initiate communication in a second language context (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1998).With regard to L2 communication, L1 and L2 WTC are likely to be independent (MacIntyre et al., 2003, cited in Cao & Philp, 2006); that is, WTC cannot be transferred from L1 to L2. As Cao and Philp (2006) pointed out, this lack of transferability is due to the fact that there is much greater variation in communicative competence among most L2 users, as well as social factors associated with L2 use (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

There is a number of factors that have been identified as directly or indirectly predictive of L2 WTC. Second language anxiety or communication apprehension as well as self-perceived competence have been consistently found to be the two variables which are closely related to L2 WTC (Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; Yashima, 2002). Motivation is depicted to correlate with L2 WTC (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre et al., 2002) or to exert indirect influence on L2 WTC (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004). It is also found that L2 WTC can be related to social support (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001), personality traits (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), and gender (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2002).

Some researchers believed that EFL learning and language achievement can be "part and parcel of students' self-identity construction" (Gao et al., 2002:115) and indicated that how individual learners went through different degrees of agency in the process of self-identity construction. Therefore we can see that in addition to all the above mentioned variables which have been identified to be predictive of L2 WTC, Language Learning Identity can be related to WTC as well.

Many researchers have contributed significantly to shape the current view of language identity as influenced by both institutional and community practices. Duff and Uchida (1997), for instance, believed that according to the sociocultural theory of identity, identities and beliefs are negotiated and changed regularly through language.

There is now a huge amount of research that explores the relationship between identity, language learning, and language teaching. (e.g., Antaki and Widdicombe (1998); Bernstein, (2000); Black, (2006); Block, (2002, 2006), etc.) Issues of identity are seen to be relevant not only to language learners, but to language teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. Regarding the potential benefits of participating in communicative interaction, some researchers argue (see for example MacIntyre et al., 1998, 2003) that the creation of WTC in the language learning process should be the fundamental goal of second language education; that is, to encourage learners to be