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FACULTY OF LITERATURE AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

MA Thesis Entitled

Multilingualism and Reading Anxiety: Evidence from Trilingual, Bilingual, and Monolingual EFL Learners

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language Teaching

By

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To the Graduate Council of Urmia University:

Hereby we are submitting a thesis written by Fahimeh Sokhandan entitled "**Multilingualism and Reading Anxiety: Evidence from Trilingual, Bilingual, and Monolingual EFL Learners**". We have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

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Dedicated to:

My Family

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The current study aimed at describing the possible effect of multilingualism on reading anxiety (RA) of Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. It was hypothesized that linguistic background (monolingualism, bilingualism, and trilingualism) does not significantly affect the RA of intermediate EFL learners. It was further hypothesized that gender does not significantly moderate the interaction between linguistic background and the RA of intermediate EFL learners. A total of 124 EFL learners, both males and females, from Tabriz, Urmia, Tehran, and Kashan English language institutes participated in this study. However, since the participants' age, linguistic typology and English language proficiency were controlled through the instruments of the study, this number was reduced to 75 intermediate EFL learners. The participants, who were within the age range of 18-26, consisted of Persian monolinguals, Turkish-Persian bilinguals, and Turkish-Persian-French trilinguals. Data were collected through: a) a two-part questionnaire composed of background information and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), and b) an adapted version of the First Certificate in English (FCE) test used for homogeneity

purposes. Results of a set of two-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of linguistic background on the RA levels of intermediate EFL learners. This effect, as the results of post-hoc Tukey's HSD multiple comparisons demonstrated, was in favor of multilinguals especially trilinguals who reported lower levels of RA. In addition, findings indicated no significant interaction between linguistic background and gender of the participants as they impacted their RA levels. Moreover, there was found no significant difference between the RA levels of male and female participants. The findings are discussed in relation to effective EFL instruction especially to multilinguals.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA   Analysis of variance

EFL   English as a foreign language

FCE   First Certificate in English

FL   Foreign language

FLA   Foreign language anxiety

FLRAS   Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale

L1   First language

L2   Second language

L3   Third language

RA   Reading anxiety

SPSS   Statistical Package for Social Sciences

TL   Target language

UK   The United Kingdom

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Globalization, as a commonplace process in the world today, requires people to keep pace with the rapid developments in various branches of science and technology. In order to better do so, people may need to raise their knowledge level and add a world language to their linguistic repertoire to effectively communicate with the other people throughout the world. Nowadays, the desire to learn two or more languages and communicate through them is becoming a pervasive phenomenon to which Bhatia and Ritchie (2006) have attended and referred as multilingualism. Multilingualism can be used as an umbrella term to refer to all types of bilingualism and trilingualism which may play a vital role in people's lives, help them have effective contacts with different people all over the world, and satisfy their diverse needs.

Whenever a person, who already knows more than one language, begins to learn a new language, his prior linguistic knowledge may act as a contributor and assist him to effectively learn the new language. As Cenoz (2003, p. 72) confirms, "the more languages one knows, the easier it becomes to acquire an additional language". This implies that learners' linguistic background may help them appropriately approach the new language learning experience and skillfully overcome the challenges of so doing.

These challenges, however, may manifest themselves through various factors such as affective, cognitive, biological, social, and instructional factors; whose levels and intensities may be fluctuated by the linguistic background of the learners. Among these factors, according to Chastain (1988), Horwitz (2007), and Garrett and Young (2009), the most influential one is the affective factors which relate to the learners' emotions, attitudes, and personalities. These factors may sometimes have different impacts, and affect or be affected by the learning process either in a positive or a negative way.

Affective factors, as Chastain (1988) lists, include subcategories like anxiety, self-concept, self-actualization, and achievement motivation. Among these subcategories, anxiety which deals with learners' feelings of apprehension and worry may have a more prominent role in the learning process. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) have attended

to anxiety in greater detail and focused on foreign language anxiety (FLA) by defining it as a distinct complex of feelings and behaviors associated with classroom language learning. Foreign language anxiety (FLA), in turn, may be manifested differently with respect to different language skills. It includes components such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing anxieties. In confirming the existence of such anxieties, Kim (2009) argues that different contexts (e.g., speaking & reading) have a significant effect on students' anxiety in learning English.

Regarding reading anxiety (RA), it is obvious that reading in a foreign language (FL) may sometimes be a challenging undertaking for some learners and be influenced by their feelings of anxiety. These feelings, consequently, may affect their performance and hinder their capabilities in such doing. Nevertheless, some people may consider reading as an activity which may not create anxiety in learners; while scholars such as Saito, Horwitz, and Garza argue that "reading in a [*sic*] FL is indeed anxiety provoking for some students" (1999, p. 215), though, at first glance it may seem to be least susceptible to anxiety effects. However, the level of reading anxiety (RA) may be fluctuated depending on various factors among which learners' linguistic background can be considered to be playing a more prominent role. Otherwise stated, learners who have a rich linguistic background may experience different levels of reading anxiety (RA) compared with learners lacking this characteristic.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Multilingualism, as a normal and remarkable necessity of life in the world today (Romaine, 2006), may influence people's lives and, in turn, be influenced by other factors. It may affect the process of communication and have some positive effects on the everyday lives of multilinguals. It may, for instance, help them expand their linguistic knowledge by learning various languages and consequently have a positive effect on the learning process (Jordà, 2003; Talebi & Maghsoudi, 2008; & Tuncer, 2009).

The issue of multilingualism becomes more salient in multilingual societies, where people have to learn and use more than one language. Iran is an obvious example of such societies, where a large number of its population, especially English as a foreign

language (EFL) learners, have different first languages like Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Lori, etc. at hand when learning additional language(s). In Iran, people have to learn Persian language as a second and national language of the country and use it as a lingua franca for official and communication purposes. Furthermore, they may sometimes need to learn a foreign language (FL) and use it for studying, working, or other international purposes. Therefore, it is evident that more attention must be paid to multilingualism in the context of Iran, to consequently clarify the interests, needs, advantages, and possibly disadvantages of multilingual individuals in the process of additional language learning. However, considering these issues, the number of studies conducted in this vein is still limited and an essential need is felt for carrying out more relevant studies to compensate for such limitations and consequently extend the insights in this regard.

Furthermore, although a wide variety of studies have been conducted in the realm of affective factors and language learning process, there have been fewer studies concentrating on a specific kind of anxiety experienced while doing reading comprehension tasks. This lack of studies may originate from the wrong belief that reading in a foreign language (FL) may not provoke anxiety in learners, though the findings of some studies (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Shariati & Bordbar, 2009) have rejected this belief. Therefore, since reading may sometimes manifest itself as an anxiety-provoking activity in some learners, it seems essential to further the studies in this regard by exploring the factors which lower its level.

The efforts done in the realm of multilingualism and affective factors have contributed to clarify issues of such kind. For instance, Marami (2009), through attending to the relationship between self-esteem and bilinguals' versus monolinguals' English language performance, revealed that bilinguals held a higher level of self-esteem than monolinguals. In addition, the results of two studies conducted by Dewaele (2007, 2010) and another done by Levine (2003) in the realm of multilingualism and anxiety showed that knowledge of more languages was linked to lower levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA).

A critical review of the literature, however, demonstrates some methodological problems in the abovementioned studies in that some of them (Levine, 2003; Dewaele, 2007; Marami, 2009) have ignored determining the proficiency levels of learners as a variable

which may affect the results. Moreover, gender of the participants, as another factor influencing the findings of the studies, has been disregarded by scholars such as Dewaele (2010), or confined to a specific gender (e.g., Jordà, 2003). Therefore, this study with the aim of alleviating the shortcomings of the previously-conducted studies, and compensating for the lack of studies in the realm of multilingualism and its effect on skill-specific anxieties, attempted to explore the effect of linguistic background of learners on their RA levels, and consequently broaden the existing literature in this regard.

1.3 Significance of the study

"Multilingualism has been the norm throughout the ages in most of the world" (Lanza, 2007, p. 45) and hence with the increasing number of the multilinguals all over the world, the need for paying much attention to this phenomenon is felt more. In this vein, the current study aimed at ascertaining the possible effects of multilingualism on a subcategory of skill-specific anxiety, namely, RA of Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners to provide beneficial insights for those interested and involved in it. This study further attempted to provide useful information about the nature of multilingualism in Iran to consequently encourage this world-wide phenomenon through highlighting its diverse impacts on additional language learning. With these objectives, therefore, the findings of this study seem to significantly serve a bunch of Iranian authorities involved in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning contexts as follows:

English teachers, as a dominant group involved in EFL instruction, may get more familiar with the role of multilingualism in educational settings of Iran through attending to the findings of this study. Particularly, teachers involved in multilingual learning settings may become more informed about the challenges, interests, and needs of multilingual learners and; consequently adjust their teaching procedures and methodologies to meet their needs.

The findings of this study may also provide researchers interested in exploring various aspects of EFL learning with some insights. These researchers, as a result, may enhance their knowledge about the nature of multilingualism in Iran and existence of differing levels of RA among EFL learners, to consequently extend the studies in the same veins.

Applying the findings of this study, test-constructors may improve their testing system by getting informed about the characteristics of multilingual EFL learners. They, therefore, may construct the reading tests with more care through considering the existence of RA among learners and the very specifications of multilingual individuals.

Curriculum developers, syllabus designers, and material developers may be other groups benefiting the findings of this study. Considering the nature, tenets, and challenges of multilingualism; the curriculum developers may examine their curriculum with more scrutiny and tune up them with the diverse linguistic backgrounds of EFL learners. Syllabus designers also may design their syllabus with more flexibility for EFL learners with different linguistic backgrounds and possibly with differing levels of RA. Additionally, based on the findings of the current study, material developers may develop the learning material with more accuracy and care through attending to the order and difficulty of the materials based on the needs of multilingual learners and their RA levels.

To sum up, this study, with the aim of deeply focusing on the nature of multilingualism, that is, expanding research into a rarely touched cohort, trilinguals, in Iran and attending to its effects on RA of Iranian EFL learners, may provide logical answers to many unanswered questions about multilingualism and its relation to EFL learning context.

1.4 Research questions and hypotheses

This study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1- Does linguistic background (monolingualism, bilingualism, and trilingualism) significantly affect the RA of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

2- Does gender moderate the interaction between linguistic background and the RA of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1- Linguistic background (monolingualism, bilingualism, and trilingualism) does not significantly affect the RA of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

2- Gender does not significantly moderate the interaction between linguistic background and the RA of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

1.5 Definitions of key terms

As the following terms have been widely used across this study, providing their definitions may be essential and beneficial for better understanding them.

Affective factors are emotional reactions of the learner which intervene the task of learning (Scovel, 1978) and include motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, and anxiety which was focus of the present study.

Bilingualism, according to Lanza (2007), is the acquisition and use of two languages. Throughout the current study, this term will be employed to refer to specific cases involving two language systems.

Foreign language anxiety is based on some negative expectations which may lead to worry, apprehension, and emotionality (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), and may facilitate or debilitate learning an FL.

Multilingualism, according to Toupa-Esfandiari (2010), is an umbrella term referring to the possibility of knowing more than one language and encompasses both bilingualism and trilingualism. In this study, this word will be used to refer either to bilingualism or trilingualism.

Reading anxiety is a specific type of FLA that language learners may experience while doing reading comprehension tasks. According to Chen, "reading anxiety is associated with the emotional reactions with which one reads a text under uneasy, fearful, nervous, or worrying situations" (2007, p. 6).

Trilingualism, according to Hoffmann (2001), contains the linguistic aspects from three languages and includes the ability to function in multilingual situations.

1.6 Organization of the thesis

In addition to chapter one which dealt with the background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, formulation of research questions and the relevant hypotheses, definition of the key terms, and the outline of the thesis in order, there are four other chapters composing this thesis:

Chapter two: Review of the related literature

This chapter consists of two parts: the theoretical concepts and a review of studies conducted in the realm of multilingualism and affective factors. The theoretical concepts clarify the nature of multilingualism and its manifestations as bilingualism and trilingualism, along with descriptions and categorizations of learner variables, FLA, skill-specific-anxieties, and the relationship between multilingualism and affective factors. Consequently, a review of previously-conducted studies in the realm of multilingualism and affective factors are provided to broaden the insights in these regards. This chapter, ultimately, ends with stating the gaps and shortcomings of the studies being reviewed.

Chapter three: Method

This chapter begins with describing the aims of the study and moves to explain the design of the study, and descriptions of participants. It also offers some explanations about the instruments employed in the study which include a two-part questionnaire comprising background information questionnaire along with Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), and an adapted version of the First Certificate in English (FCE) test, and provides a full description of the items included in them. Finally, the procedures of conducting the study and data analysis method are explained in detail.

Chapter four: Results and discussions

This chapter deals with the analysis of the quantitative data to test the formulated hypotheses by the use of appropriate statistical tests, tables, and line graphs. It finally ends with discussing the findings of the study with the relevant researches conducted previously.