

IN THE NAME OF GOD



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Role of mother tongue in third language acquisition

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LANGUAGE

BY

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Dedicated to
Soul of my
father
And patient
of my mother

Abstract

Role of mother tongue in third language acquisition

By

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The present study examines the effects of mother tongue (L1) literacy on third language (L3) learning and student overall anxiety. Eighty institute students were selected from two different contexts (Iran, Turkey) participated in this study; they were acquired L1 and L3 literacy at the same time during the 3 years. The students were proficient L2 users but they have some problems in reading and writing their L1 and their L3. In each context the student were divided base on their experimentation groups (experimental, control). Students' score on the different English and Kurdish test were analyzed through Kruskal Wails Test, Mann Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon singed Rank Test. The findings indicate that the L1 literacy was an important factor in learning and acquiring preceding languages. Moreover, the results indicate that Kurd students in Turkey learn English more slowly than Iranian Kurd students. Finally the results indicate that Kurd students in Turkey are more anxious than Iranian students. The findings of this study suggest that in multilingual context like Iran and Turkey L1 has great role in second and third language learning; the martial developers should put emphasis on L1 literacy. Moreover, the government policy in restricting minority languages causes bad damages in acquisition and learning new languages in these two contexts over the past daces.

Key words: L1, L3, language acquisition, literacy, multilingualism, anxiety

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 Preliminaries

The world in which we live is shaped by cultures, nations, governments, companies and institutions. Any of them is born and died repeatedly during the history of humankind. Each culture and nation was born with a language and died with it. We are human because we use language and communicate with each other. Internet, satellite, computers, and communication devices develop communication around the world. Man needs to learn and speak other languages for communicating with other cultures and nations. But, it is hard and impossible to learn every language. Therefore, people learn common language or languages to communicate with others. English is one of the most common languages around the world, which people use to communicate with each other.

English language is one of the common and popular languages, but many factors promote or prevent people from learning or acquiring this language. Among these factors, mother tongue has a great role in learning or acquiring additional language or languages. The role of mother tongue in second language was declared first by contrastive and error language analysts (Ellis 2006). They believe that the similarity between L1 and target language may cause some errors in language production (Selinker & Gass 2008). Schachter (1974) found an interesting result in comparing the errors of five bilingual students with different L1 in producing English relative clauses. He found that the Persian and Arab students had more error in producing relative clauses than he compared the structure of English, Arabic, and Persian relative clause; he found the similarities

between the three languages. Based on the results he developed this idea that the similarities between structure of L1 and L2 cause these errors. Moreover, we can say that the L1 has great influence over proceeding languages. Ellis (2008) believed that role of first language in learning the additional languages is important. It is important to have an over view on L1 or in other words mother tongue.

It is better to define the mother tongue. There is no agreement among the scholars in the area of language acquisition research on the definition and name of the language or languages an individual may acquire throughout his lifetime. In other words, it is hard to make distinctions among languages and named them as first, second, third etc. First, mother, or native language or languages if learned simultaneously from birth are referred to as L1, the subsequent language or languages if learned concurrently as L2, and the languages learned later or immediately after L2 as L3 regardless of how many languages may actually follow the second language learned. The Mother tongue is at first glance quite a suitable term for the language a child acquires and uses in communication with people around him. The child acquires the language or the vernacular languages of the mother and father, and quite often this is the same language as the majority language of the speech community where he lives. However, the linguistic situations tend to be more complex and a static notion of the mother tongue does not capture the dynamic process of having and maintaining a mother tongue under shifting linguistic conditions. For instance, a boy born in Norway by Russian parents is exposed to Russian from birth, and acquires Russian as his mother tongue. In this situation his mother tongue is not the same as the language of the majority. In addition, the child becomes bilingual due to exposure to the linguistic environment. In this situation the child might be said to be a bilingual speaker (Schulz, 2001). Let us consider a hypothetical case, the boy's elder sister who has arrived in Norway after the age of four years. This girl has Russian as the mother tongue and she learns Norwegian as her second language. After some years in

Norway, she might wish to label Norwegian as the mother tongue as Norwegian is the language she uses most of the time at school, with friends and the younger sister, and at leisure activities.

The concept of mother tongue is thus not a clear-cut notion, and researchers in the area of bilingualism refer to different ways to determine a mother tongue, (Baker 2001; Engen & Kulbrandstad 2004; Romaine 1995). Genetically, the mother tongue is the language that the mother or other caretakers expose the child to. Chronologically, the mother tongue is the language that a speaker acquires first. Mother tongue is the language that a speaker knows best. From a functional perspective mother tongue is the language that a speaker uses most. Finally, mother tongue is the language that the speaker is identified with. It seems that one could say mother tongue is a social construct, and the speaker is a social agent who actively uses languages in identity construction. Due to the unclear definition of mother tongue, researchers use the notion of first language as a more technical notion in studies of language acquisition.

As a solution to the above mentioned confusion, some researchers use the term “heritage language” which distinguishes itself from the first, mother, or native language as it is applied to an individual whose speech community and educational institution uses a majority language but who is in constant contact with a minority language (usually spoken at home). Heritage speakers have varied levels of proficiency in the minority language (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). In this study, first language or mother tongue is used instead of heritage language. It is mentioned that mother tongue has a great role in learning or acquiring additional language or languages.

The role of mother tongue on learning or acquiring second or third language can be explained by cross-linguistic research (Odlin, 2005). L1 has great

influence in learning the preceding languages (Gass & Selinker, 2008) ; but it is difficult to assessing what are the L1 forms and structure that L2 learner brings to the second language acquisition situation (Norris & Ortega, 2003). Some scholar including Carroll (2001) analyzed the psycholinguists' perspective process of second language acquisition as far as it deal with individual language acquisition, production and comprehension but this view is incomplete because we acquire a language through communication and communication happens within society (Melhorn, 2007). Therefore, sociolinguistic factors like sex, age, social class, first language, culture, etc emerge and work along with psycholinguistics' factors. Based on Hufeisen and Marx 2007 theoretical framework six important factors affect the process of third language acquisition ; these six factors are (a) neurophysiological factors, (b) learner external factors, (c) emotional factors, (d) cognitive factors, (e) forging language specific factors, (f) linguistic factors. This study was examined some concepts of theses six important factors.

1.1 Statement of the research problem

Today one of the biggest concerns of most scholars and English language teachers is that most learners have problems and difficulties in learning English. This problem has been a major concern for many years. Over the years, many studies had been done to determine the factors related to the students' success or failure in learning English. Some of these studies concerned with the importance of intelligence and some others found that personality factors like anxiety, learning strategies, and self-esteem played an important role in student learning. But nowadays scholars found that sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors have a great role in learning or acquiring other languages. The previous acquired language or languages and the context where we live have a great role in learning or acquiring other languages. Based on Ellis (2008) over 80 percent of people are

bilingual these days and they seek to learn a third language. Based on this information investigation in TLA is more important than SLA. Additionally, knowledge of a language means using a language perfectly for reading and writing etc. Cummings (1998, 1999) states that literacy in previous language or languages facilitate learning the following language. Even though literacy in previous language can facilitate learning the following language and Cummings approved it in (1998) by interdependence or iceberg hypothesis .Cummings' interdependence or iceberg hypothesis reveals the relationship of the first language to the learning of another language. What appears to be two very different phenomena on or above the surface is actually interdependent psychologically. But in many countries including Middle East countries people had banned to use their first language mainly Kurds in Turkey (Spolskey& Hult 2008). They are unskillful in their first language and may be this problem makes learning other languages hard or may be literacy in first language helps them to learn third language easily. This study, intends to investigate the role of mother tongue literacy in learning or acquainting of third language and point out the importance of literacy in first language.

1.2 Significance of the Study

In recent years, TLA has become the focus of attention and subject of extensive research among language teachers, linguists, and researchers (Cenoz & Jessner, 2009). Researchers of this area mainly interested in cross-linguistic influence and have several phrases to choose from in referring to the, including the following: *language transfer, linguistic interference, the role of mother tongue, native language influence, and language mixing* (Odlin, 2005). Several books, collections of articles, and state-of-the-art papers in the last fifteen years or so show that interest in L1 influence remains strong (e.g., Dechert and Raupach,

1989; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Kellerman, 1983, 1995; Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith, 1986; Odlin, 1989, 2005; Ringbom, 1987, 2007; Selinker, 1992). Still there is a lot of room free for discussion about the role of mother tongue literacy or learning on proceeding languages. On the other hand minority languages always have conflict with majority languages or sometimes they are ignored by government policy (Meriläinen, 2010). This conflict sometimes prevents students to learn the language which is mainly force by governments or sometimes they have negative attitude toward learning other languages (Jessner, 1999). Base on this L1 literacy is a very curial since it contributes to students' success in learning and acquiring the following language or languages (Eliss, 2005, 2008). Unfortunately, a few numbers of teachers and scholars and material developers are concerned with this factor (Jessner, 2005). This study intends to show the importance of this factor in two different contexts which the minority language (Kurdish) is restricted for some decays.

1.3 Objective of the Study

This study intends to investigate the role of Kurdish literacy as an L1 in the acquisition of English as an L3.

For this purpose, the study tends to answer these questions.

Research questions

1. Is there any difference in learning English among bilingual students who have the same L1?
2. Can more success in L1 literacy learning be attributed to L3 context?
3. Is there any difference in L3 achievement among multilingual students?
4. Is there any relation between L1 and L3 and can proficiency in L1 help

better performance in L3?

5. Are skillful students in L1 less anxious in learning English as L3 or not?
6. Does government language policy in restricting minority languages (Kurdish in Iran and Turkey) cause problems in learning English as L3?

1.4 Conceptual and Operational Definitions of the Variables

As far as this study deals with first and third language acquisition in multilingual society with bilingual students so it is better to have a definition of L1, L3, Mother-tongue literacy - Bilingual literacy - Traditional literacy and L3 literacy. In this part, the conceptual and operational definitions of L1, L3 and mother tongue literacy and L3 literacy presented.

1.4.1 Definitions of L1

The whole field of language acquisition is young enough that researchers have not reached a convention that everyone adheres to in terms of labeling the languages being studied.

First, mother, or native language or languages if learned simultaneously from birth are referred to as L1, the subsequent language or languages if learned concurrently as L2, and the following language(s) as L3 (regardless of how many languages may actually follow the second language learned). The term “heritage language” distinguishes itself from the first, mother, or native language as it is applied to the individual who speaks L2 in community and educational institution as a majority language but who is in constant contact with a minority language usually spoken at home). Heritage speakers have various levels of proficiency in the minority language.