Review of Studies on Second Language Learners ' Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract. In the era of globalization, acquisition of the second language must overcome the restrictions of language structure and assimilate cultures to enhance the ability of cross-cultural communication. Nevertheless, the traditional education does not consider cultural incorporation and the current studies are divided. The origins of multidisciplinary accomplishments are synthesized in this paper to build a holistic framework that elucidates the influence of intercultural competence on second language acquisition in terms of theoretical integration, structure elaboration and empirically. Empirical data indicate that the cultural dimensions theory by Hofstede about culture and cultural values can be used to study the influence of cultural values on knowledge internalization regarding language, where intercultural competence participants will have a considerably higher accuracy in their lexical semantic recollection. The theory of intercultural communication formulated by Hall emphasizes the motivational effect of nonverbal behaviors; in this case, it is observed that learners who undergo training in nonverbal communication portray high levels of integrative motivation. The cultural adaptation theory exposes the dynamic effect of intercultural competence on social adaptation: the intercultural competence learners can better manage cultural conflicts, whereas the tracking of dual cultural identity effects the social efficiency of learners. Intercultural competence plays a major role in enhancing the acquisition of second languages. The review of the researches on the intercultural competence of second language learners is relatively few, so it is necessary to do such researches.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence, second language acquisition, language competence.

1. Introduction

In the present globalized and fast paced world, second language acquisition has not only been a kind of skill enrichment process, but it has also come to assume an essential channel of intercultural communication competence development. The formal constraints in language learning have to be overcome as cross-cultural interaction pressures are increasing, whereas cultural disparities have a significant influence on linguistic effectiveness, and these two are the core of the studies in language acquisition.

In the contemporary world of research, different scholars have touched on the topic from different viewpoints. Some scholars addressed the interrelation between intercultural communication competence and the second language acquisition where he hypothesized that intercultural communication competence is multidimensional, having knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness, which are important in determining the performance of the second language learners in the real-life communication. Some focused more on pragmatic level, which studies how cultural context influences pragmatic skills of learners that include the expression of verbal behavioral skills like the requests and refuses message. Some researchers investigated the influence of cultural adaptation on second language learning, and they noted that the effects of cultural adaptation to the cultural context of the target language are on language learning outcomes of the learners. On the domestic level, the research on the theme of productive bilingualism found out that the cultural factors have a positive impact on second language learning. The research which was conducted on the motivation of English learners also partially solved the motivational impact of cultural factors.

Nevertheless, although most universities have initiated cultural orientation in teaching of English, there are still problems. These are absence of adequate teaching materials, absence of standardized methodology of training teachers, and the absence of any evaluation system. Theoretically, there has been some progress in the existing research, yet the majority of them are also fragmented studies, lacking systematic analysis. An overview of the way intercultural competence affects the process of second language acquisition has not yet been established.

This work is a key contribution to the academic community because it builds a problematic gap to the systematic development of a detailed model of the role of cross-cultural competence in the process of knowledge acquisition of the second language (L2 acquisition). So far, no study has combined interdisciplinary attainments of intercultural communication study, second language acquisition theory and educational psychology in terms of theory synthesis, framework building and empirical research. This study will be used to identify this missing research gap by offering pedagogical mechanisms to enhance the development of theoretical as well as practical aspects of intercultural L2 acquisition. Consequently, learners in English as a Second or Foreign language (ESL/EFL) learning need to be accorded cultural background and cultural literacy to enable them to acquire cross-cultural communication competence in the target language [1]. Internal validation was conducted on the gathered data by comparing statistical data to system requirements and expectations [2,3].

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Aspects of Cultural Dimensions

Cultural aspects of power distance, collectivism, and individualism proposed by Hofstede indicate how cultural values are deeply ingrained in the use of language. In other words, in a collectivist culture (e.g. China, Japan), indirect rejection (e.g. I may not be too convenient) is another social strategy of preserving interpersonal harmony within the situation of high power distance; in individualistic countries (e.g. the United States and Germany) direct refusal (e.g. I do not want to) is closer to the low-power distance communication norms [4]. The difference necessitates that learners should learn to know their culture-laden meanings concurrently in learning second language vocabulary. Empirical studies have demonstrated that cross-culturally competent learners are much better at detecting the emotional colour of vocabulary and determining when it is applicable in context, and they have predicted (nearly 40 per cent) more accurate semantics of vocabulary through memory [5]. Culture and language are inseparable; they influence each other and play a major role in language learning in order to form the second language knowledge. Cultures may have their unique modes of thinking, a system of values and societal norms, which dominate through their language expression and way of communicating. An example is that in societies where group interests and harmonious relations are prized people are more tactful and indirect in their dialogue. On the other hand, individualistic and straight forward cultures tend to embrace simpler forms of communication. Such variations in the use of languages imply that learners of the second language who would have only learnt the linguistic forms without considering their cultural backgrounds would find it hard to attain accurate and appropriately communicative forms and ultimately, fail to have the language.

2.2. Hofstede 's Theory

Besides this, the Hofstede theory also focuses on the role of cultural dimensions on pragmatic rules. Intercultural competence will enhance the suitability of language expression of learners by assisting them in identifying these differences. The theory by Hofstede also focuses on the effect of cultural dimensions on pragmatic rules. High UA cultures (as in Greece) prefer to avoid risks by using euphemisms. Cultures are not comfortable about the unknown and unpredictable and thus use euphemisms to tone their voices down and not to make absolute claims, so that to reduce the number of risks and conflicts. Low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures (which include Sweden) like direct expression. These cultures are more accommodating to uncertainty and change wherein as people believe that simple communication, they can be able to pass information in a clearer way and enhance

efficiency. Such differences are also recognised with the assistance of cross-cultural communication competence, and this plays a crucial role in increasing the adequacy of the language expression. Further, the theory developed by Hofstede reveals the influence of other cultural dimensions on the pragmatic rules. As an example, language in high-power distance cultures such as Malaysia is a clear arrangement of hierarchical nature. To respect superiors, subordinates can speak more deferentially and use words of close relationship. Conversely, the more egalitarian communication styles present in low power - distance cultures like Denmark disposition lead to more casual speech from people within a society irrespective of their social status. With the knowledge of these different cultural - based pragmatic rules, learners of languages can prevent cultural misconceptions and misunderstandings. This means that they are able to modify their language strategies depending on the various cultural situations, which enhances their communication to be more effective and harmonious thus in the end, the cross cultural communication process is well achieved. It is a crucial theory and assists individuals in comprehending and the values and behavior patterns of various cultures.

2.3. The Theory of the High-context and Low-context Communication of Hall

The high-context and low-context theory of communication proposed by Hall extends to note that nonverbal communication (through the use of body language, silence, distance, etc.) is a significant aspect of culture communication. As an example, high-context cultures (Arabic and East Asian cultures) use non-linguistic communication to transfer implicit meanings whereas low-context cultures (German and Switzerland cultures stress language coding) [6]. This disparity can easily result in anxiety among the learners, which is caused by culture shock during the first phase, but their self-esteem in the language is greatly boosted by positive feedback during cross-cultural interaction. A moderating role of nonverbal behavior according to Hall theory is to indicate that, being capable of correctly perceiving the nonverbal cue of the target culture leads to the comprehensibility of the language input provided by a learner to improve, the motivation towards learning transforms into the virtue circle between instrumental and intrinsic. The High-Context and Low-Context Communication Theory created by Hall emphasizes the importance of nonverbal cues (including body language, silence, and the distance between people) in cultural communication. High-context cultures (e.g., the Arab and East Asian cultures) utilize non verbals in passing an implicit message. Indeed, in such cultures, a lot of the information is not stated directly with words, but rather it is implicit in the context, non-verbal interaction, and background knowledge. An example is the smile or a glance or even observed silence. Low context cultures (e.g., the German culture and Swiss culture) rely on explicit encoding of the verbal system. In such cultures individuals have a tendency of using a straightforward language that is easy to understand to prevent confusion. This cultural difference can lead to some initial anxiety of the learners caused by culture shock, yet positive feedback of cross-cultural interactions can make the learners confident in their language. Empirical research indicates that learners who undergo training in nonverbal communication exhibit almost thirty percent of higher integration motivation as well as increased engagement in the activities of the target culture community [7]. The theory proposed by Hall also indicates that when the nonverbal cues of the target culture are interpreted accurately, the level of language input becomes easier to understand to change the learning motivation factor to the more virtuous and intrinsic which results in a vicious cycle [8].

3. Empirical Study

3.1. Effect of Intercultural Communicative Competence on Language Competence

Development of intercultural communicative competence influences greatly in enhancing language competence of learners [9]. Culture has a close association with language. The insight into the cultural connotation of the language is the gate to enhancing the practicality of the use of language. Intercultural communicative competence: intercultural learners may be in a position to recognize the language expression in other cultural conditions, in order to succeed in enhancing their listening

comprehension. This is not only useful in assisting them to highlight important information on listening materials but also allows them to understand the intention and the feeling of the speaker more precisely. When it comes to oral expression, intercultural communicative competence helps learners to select the correct language expressions based on various cultural background and communicative situations in order to enhance the correctness and suitability of oral expression. With regards to reading and writing skill, the knowledge in depth about the culture of the target language enables the learners to acquire a better comprehension about the aspects of the culture that can be seen in reading documents and similarly they become more conversant with the mode of thought and the habit of expression of the target language can be more relaxed in writing. Intercultural communicative competent learners are in a better position to understand the expressions of language in other cultures, hence enhancing their listening comprehension. This not only assists them to take important information into the listening material but also allows them to better understand the intentions and emotions of the speakers. In terms of reading and writing skills, as the learners have a deeper understanding of the culture of the target language, it is more likely that they will become less puzzled when understanding cultural aspects in the reading materials and are more likely to use the thinking patterns and expression habit of the target language naturally in writing, producing more authentic patterns of discourse.

3.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence and Cultural Understanding

Intercultural communicative competence is crucial in enabling the learners to interpret and adjust to the communicative rules and modes of thinking within other cultural backgrounds. Development of intercultural communicative competence helps the learners to think deeply of such differences and prevent the conflicts that come up due to cultural misunderstanding. Indicatively, in certain high-context cultures individuals would be more inclined towards non-verbal signals and implicit meanings whereas in low-context cultures people are more inclined towards the use of explicit language, while rely more on explicit verbal expressions [10, 11]. The intercultural communicative competence learners are able to perceive the intentions of one another correctly and enhance the effectiveness of communication, based on various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the cultural knowledge of the various cultures can open the minds of the learners, increase their culture inclusiveness and make them confident and relaxed in cross cultural communication. Cultivation of this competence will allow a person to detect cultural differences carefully and prevent conflicts that can arise due to the lack of understanding. As an example, people in high context cultures prefer to convey messages via non-verbal factors and implicit meanings unlike low context cultures where communication is conducted directly through verbal terms. Individuals who are interculturally competent are able to correctly decode the intentions of each other and improve their communication efficiency based on cultural backgrounds. Besides, cross-cultural knowledge helps to open the mind of learners, promote cultural inclusivity, and ensure their ability to communicate effectively and without fear in multiethnic environments.

3.3. Interpersonal Correlation Between Learning Motivation and Intercultural Communicative Competence

The motivation to learn is another aspect that has great influence on the creation of intercultural communicative competence. Integrative motivation encourages the learners to be interested in becoming part of the target language culture and also makes them create contact with the target language group. This incentive makes them eager to learn language and cultural background and enhance their skill of intercultural communication. Intrinsic motivation refers to the interest of the learners in language learning and exploration over cultures in fact. Students who are internally motivated will be more active in the educational process and will constantly challenge themselves, therefore, reaching performance at a greater level in cross-cultural communication. The achievement motivation makes learners wish to attain excellent results in the field of language learning and cross culturual communication and they will work to enhance their capacity of reaching their objective.

Such motivation affects both others and in combination advances the emergence of learners intercultural communicative competence.

3.4. Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Teaching Practice

Regarding the teaching practice, numerous works have addressed the approaches to developing the intercultural communicative competence of learners successfully. It has been shown that Immersive learning environment is an effective teaching approach. Within such a setting, the learners can get into closer touch and interaction with the target language culture to the extent that they can gain better understanding and adjustment to the target language culture. Meanwhile, it was also discovered during the study that the effect of the high motivation group students on the immersive learning environment is greater, and the latter reiterates the significance of the learning motivation in developing intercultural communicative competence. Also, teachers teaching styles, choice and use of teaching materials will also influence the development of intercultural communicative competence of learners [9]. It is important that teachers embrace diversified approaches in teaching and expose the learners to enriched cultural content as a way of equipping them to engage in cross cultural communication activities and enhance their cross cultural awareness and competence [3].

4. Conclusion

The relationship of intercultural communicative competence and second language acquisition is essentially a two-sided or two way process in which cultural cognition is stimulated by language development and language practice, culture is enhanced by cultural cognition. It is the responding aspect of this dynamic nature that highlights the importance of considering the acquisition of second language not just as a linguistic activity but as a cultural experience. The theory of cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede provides an effective and working analytical model of this process that should outline the impact cultural values and norms make on the use and translation of the language. To make the most out of this bi-directional relationship, there is a need to balance the gap between theory and practice of language use and translation. It is possible with the system of culture teaching which is combined with the language context. This would provide the learners with both the language and cross-cultural literacy knowledge to cope effectively in intercultural exchange. At the end, it is intended to allow the learners to attain a unity of both language fluency and cultural suitability. In this way, the value of the second language may be entirely achieved as one of the most powerful tools of cross-cultural communication that will help to develop only practical interests in the fields of science and economy among others at the global level.

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