

Original Article: Mutual Relationship Between Foreign Language Learning and Cultural Identity: A Critical Overview

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ABSTRACT

The present qualitative study explores the relationship between English language learning and identity reform from the view of Iranian language learners. The data are collected by interviews with twenty male advanced learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The researcher believes that learning English has a profound impact on how they perceive their identity. Motivation and English as an international language have vital role in viewing and reconstructing identity. These days, identity change is more common as people are experiencing globalization. That is why sociocultural issues have vital role in recognizing shift and reconstruction. Identity is definitely reflective of an individual's sense of self. This paper seeks to explore the link between language learning and identity by examining the relationship between language learning and identity. Learning a new language is an experience that includes the whole person: mentally, emotionally, and cognitively.

Introduction

Terms such as identity and self are very common in literature of language-learning, and related volumes and documents that are written each year. This is not surprising, considering that the primary vehicle of self-expression is language. It is often said that a new language means learning a fresh personality. Researchers are interested in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA), language education and sociolinguistics, applied linguistics,

sociological and cultural aspects of language learning in the relationship between identity and language learning.

Identity is definitely reflective of an individual's sense of self. This paper seeks to explore the link between language learning and identity by examining the relationship between language learning and identity. Learning a new language is an experience that includes the whole person: mentally, emotionally, and cognitively. Students fluctuate between their own interpretation as speakers of their first language (L1) and their

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knowledge as learners of a second language (L2). Language and culture are inseparably intertwined. Students should be given the insights which will enable them to acquire the necessary cultural knowledge for participating in the second culture background. Both learners and teachers of a second language need to understand cultural differences, and identify openly that people in the world are not all the same beneath the skin. Spolsky (1989) stated about difference between the natural or informal environment of the target language community and the formal environment of the classroom:

The distinction between the two is usually stated as a set of contrasting conditions. In natural second language learning, the language is being used for communication, but in the formal situation it is used only to teach. In natural language learning, the learner is surrounded by fluent speakers of the target language, but in the formal classroom, only the teacher (if anyone) is fluent. In natural learning, the context is the outside world, open and stimulating; in formal learning, it is the closed four walls of the classroom. In natural language learning, the language used is free and normal; in the formal classroom it is carefully controlled and simplified. Finally, in the natural learning situation, attention is on the meaning of the communication; in the formal situation, it is on meaningless drills [1-5].

On the one hand. The individual's personality is defined as introverted or extroverted. Inhibited, extroverted or uninhibited. The learner's behaviors are believed to determine the motivation of the target language population. On the other hand, the social one typically refers to group differences between the learner of the language and a target group of languages. Where congruence exists between the second language group and the target language group, the social distance between them is considered to be minimal, which in turn facilitates the acculturation of the second language group into the target language group and improves language learning [2]. In the case of the target language, Norton (1997) again shows identity as either a motivation either instrumental or inclusive. In the role of instrumental inspiration, identity demonstrates the language learner's willingness in learning a second language for practical reasons, such as seeking a job. Identity as an inclusive incentive, however, illustrates their need to learn a language in order to incorporate with the target

language population effectively, and escape from being alone. There are two distinct views on identity, according to Giles and Coupland (as quoted in Jenkins, 2000): first, language learners either conform their speech to that of the interlocutor in order to be both liked and understood; second, language learners proclaim themselves members of the groups of interlocutors [5].

Review of Literature

The literature on language and social identity and its connection to SLA is massive. The first paper connecting the idea of identity problems to second language acquisition (SLA) was Firth and Wagner (1997), but not directly. In their paper, Firth and Wagner questioned the narrow perception of identity that had been addressed in most second language (L2) learning studies, which were the native speakers (NS) identity and non-native speakers (NNS) identity. They believed that the identification of NS and NNS was just one element of the separate social identities. Later on, Gass (1998) called for the need to classify L2 learning identity categories and argued that while previous SLA research examined L2 learners from a cognitive perspective that classified L2 learners as fixed and binary terms such as motivated and unmotivated, introverted and extroverted, the socio-cultural perspective viewed these dispositional characters as situated and could channel them. Gass further argued that the theory and study of language learning needed to examine the power struggles in the social environments and in the target language group in order to better understand the linguistic actions and success of L2 learners within a certain social context. There has also been a substantial increase in studies performed to explore the interrelationship between the social identification of learners and L2 learning. Ortega, (2009) stated that for many people, language learning is never just about language itself; maybe the object of learning a new language stems from their desire to improve the social environment, to be accepted by other members, or to become more successful in society. In addition to the standard view of the cognitive process, Block (2003) also postulated that language learning should be conceptualized as a social process [6].

Roberts (2001) points out that the learner is known as an individual with multiple identities in this literature, many of which are contradictory. Wigglesworth (2005) notes that there has been a lot of controversy about the relationship between language and identity over the last few decades, and there is some agreement that language is an ethnic identity marker [7].

Peirce (1989) explores the personal and social investments of adult ethnic minority women in studying English as a second language, how these are visible in their experiences and the ways in which those social identities are foregrounded. Pavlenko (2003) reflects on the relationship between national identities and policies and procedures for foreign-language education in another study. It is argued that changes in images of national identity and sociopolitical allegiances have consequences for policies and procedures for foreign-language education. Teachers viewed themselves, such as principals, students, and parents of students, in terms of their relationships with others [1].

Norton (2011) believes that the recent growth as a consequence of a change in interest from the psycholinguistic interest in identity, Emphasizing the sociological and sociological aspects of language learning Anthropological implications of the learning of languages. Barnawi (2009) explored the negotiation and formation of personality and Two Saudi Arabian English language students at American universities.

Barnawi's research focused on the competence of the subjects in involvement and membership and revealed their difficulty in the TL community socializing. Huang (2011) set out to investigate identity of 35 Taiwanese students are developing non-English majors. The conclusions was verified that most of the respondents identified positive metaphors to identify their L2 self-development by studying English. Zacharias (2012) studied that the identity negotiation and construction of 35 Indonesian multilingual EFL learners. This study showed that the respondents valued their national negatively identity. Morita (2004) also carried out a multiple case study on the negotiation of L2 learners. L2 learners' negotiation of identities and participation in a Canadian university to determine that relations of power played a significant role in this process.

Wang and Phillion (2011) examined the identity construction of two students in eastern China based on the postcolonial theory of identity. Their analysis revealed students' identity construction was related to issues of power, dominance, and hegemony. Li and Simpson (2013) examined the attitudes of migrant learners to English to Other Language Speakers (ESOL) for the restoration of personality in a migrant climate. Taking a poststructuralist identity viewpoint. A research was conducted by Ritzau (2015) that clearly it showed that Danish language students, even at the beginning level of the language, Education, embarked on self-positioning in the TL and identity work. Despite the value of interpretation and negotiation of L2 identity, research on learners' Perceptions of the reconstruction of identity by language learning in Iran there was not a very rigorous background [5].

The conflict in the identity creation of teachers was studied by Coldron and Smith (1999). They looked at professional teacher identity as fractured and numerous entities. In this way, the identity of an active position in a social environment was more or less conferred or achieved. Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, and Kron (2003) examined how teachers viewed their classroom professional positions and how these views were related to their self-image. The role of cultural workers for teachers was described by Duff and Uchida (1997). "They found that" teachers are very interested in the dissemination of culture, and there is social, cultural, and educational meaning to any collection of videos, newspaper clippings, seating arrangements, events, and so on "(p. 476).

Moore and Hofman (1988) surveyed 247 teachers on the issue of teacher identity in Israel in an EFL sense. The findings showed that educators thought that self-esteem and self-actualization were more important for them than job satisfaction. In another report, Fisherman (2015) surveyed 240 teachers using two questionnaires (teacher burnout and professional identity scales) to examine the relationship between professional identity and burnout among three different groups of school teachers in Israel [8].

A case study was conducted in Iran by Abednia (2012) to explore how a critical teacher education course could contribute to the professional identity building process among Iranian EFL teachers.

There have been three changes from conformity to vital autonomy; from no orientation to transformative orientation; and from a linguistic point of view to an educational point of view in SL education to develop the professional identity of Iranian teachers. Masoumpanah and Zarei (2014) also found Iranian in another analysis. Teachers have taken up their career in society as a respectable work. The results of their study also showed that Iranian teachers appeared to produce native-like bilinguals, which in turn influenced their professional identity, towards ordinary English.

In terms of three modes of belonging to a community of practice, including participation, imagination, and alignment, Wenger (1998) studied the process of identity building. As a professional community, Wenger's community of belonging may be compared to the community of educators. Belonging to a teaching group plays an important role in the identity building process of teachers in this community.

Bijaared, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) dealt with the notion of professional identity and stressed the practical side of the identity of teachers. They introduced the identity structure of teachers focused on 'what teachers' do by exploring the professional identity of teachers from three fields of expertise, including expertise in subjects or content, pedagogical expertise, and didactic expertise. Finally, a case study was carried out by Farrell (2011) to investigate the concept of role identity among ESL teachers. He fused the word role with identity and, under the title of role identity for teachers, coined a new synthesized term. Farrell's (2011) framework assigned three main categories for teachers' role identity [1].

Joseph (2004) argues that the self, has always been privileged by identity studies, whereas if we want to research language as a social phenomenon. We need to redress the balance by paying at least as much attention to the forms in which identities are ascribed and created by others on the basis of the available culture-specific repertoire. Therefore, the study of identity as a self-image is not distinct from ethno linguistics.

Shohamy (2006) points out that languages should not be the only distinguishing criteria for societies; they should be studied in more integrated ways instead. It can be considered a racist act to use language as the sole indicator of identity [5]

Norton (2000) argued that, the targeted population could be a reconstruction of past cultures and traditionally constituted relationships in many language classrooms, but also a community of imagination that provides prospects in the future for an enhanced variety of identity choices. Work on language education, applied linguistics and SLA will remain at the forefront of identity and language learning problems in the future [9]

Norton (1997) described "social identity" as "the link between the person and the wider social world, mediated by institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and courts of law" (p. 420). The social identity theory of Norton is concerned with the relationship between authority, identity, and learning language. Weedon (1997) stressed the individual's organization. She suggested a 'subjectivity theory'. In different social media, the person is seen as both the subject of and subject to the ties of power. In other words, the individual is the victim of social forces, as Ellis (2008) points out, but is also able to form his / her own identity. Identity can therefore be assumed as the potential power, and it is the social context that offers opportunities for language learners to improve this potential. The view that language learning is inextricably linked to social conditions, in particular power relations, is at the core of all these perspectives, and can only be promoted if these are addressed. Polat and Schallert (2013) was one of the first identity studies linked to a particular field of language skills (accent attainment) and followed a mixed approach of data processing study (quantitative and qualitative). Polat and Schallert studied how the self-determined motivation and affiliation of learners with their L1 and L2 groups affected their achievement of the L2 accent. The word identity was described by McNamara, Hansen and Liu (as cited in Norton, 2013) as the attempt at people Make their relationship with the world understand how that relationship is formed over time and space, and how people see their potential possibilities. In addition, Norton (1997) accepted in his article that this identity relates to the tendency to remember, the willingness to affiliate, and the willingness to affiliate with West (1992). Stockton (2015) also claimed that the term 'identity' can be clarified by the word Cultural, linguistic, ethnic, social, racial, gender, academic or literate, political, and literary terms: Class. However, be named

'unspecified' if it was used without certain qualifications [10].

The purpose of this study is to investigate mutual Relations of foreign language learning and cultural identity. Therefore, the following research questions are put forward:

1. How do Iranian EFL learners perceive identity?
2. How do Iranian EFL learners perceive identity construction through learning English?
3. How the Iranian learners' attitudes shape their cultural identity as modern, educated Iranian individuals?

Discussion

Language and social identity

In sociolinguistics, "linguistics" means concentration on how language is used. In Sociolinguistics, the "socio" demonstrates that we really concentrate on how language is used in social context and how it is used when people communicate with each other at interpersonal and larger community, cultural, national, and international levels. Norton (1997) defined 'social identity' as "the relationship between the individual and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts". The social identity theory of Norton is concerned with the relationship between authority, identity, and learning language. It draws on a variety of sources, as Ellis (2008) maintains, such as West (1992). On the surface level, the relation between identity and language may not seem straightforward, but in many social contexts, particularly in multilingual and multicultural circumstances, language can be used by interlocutors as a powerful tool to index a specific identity [5].

Although the notion of the role of teacher identity has become increasingly relevant in teacher education literature, this has not been taken into account comprehensively among Iranian researchers. The teacher's position in Iran was merely reduced to an educator and an examiner. Obviously, the role of language teachers plays a crucial role in the management of the classroom, and in the defining of the identity and the social and cultural aspects of educational contexts. According to Gumperz (1982):

We-code referred to a social minority language used at home and within the same groups (in-group code), while they-code referred to the social majority language used while speaking with outsiders (out-group code). People may switch their communication "codes" depending on the interlocutors and the conversational contexts.

The most persuasive of all the theories of second language identity may be that developed by Norton "In her second language identity theory, the most important element was the concept of investment" because, according to her, if students invest in a second language, they do so with the expectation that they will gain a wider range of symbolic and material tools, which in turn will increase the value of their cultural capital" [11].

Identity Construction in linguistic Practice

Social reproduction includes the process of reproduction of social structures and systems. Language with its symbolic content encodes sociocultural meanings that are transmitted generation by generation. In this way, social norms are replicated. Language has the ability to change sociocultural meanings. In addition, encoding, language helps to identify sociocultural definitions in contexts. Social identities, are encoded and constructed through linguistics. Under the concept of Gass and Selinker (2009), "SLA is the study of how non-primary languages are learned. "They're learned. It is the acquisition outside the native language of a language. An extra addition language is sometimes referred to as L2, while L1 reflects a first language or the mother tongue of a speaker.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) described culture from a social viewpoint. Culture Identity is part of social identity, but not the same as identity. Such authors also claim that "the integration into the culture of the complex configuration that is culture" "The personality of the individual constitutes his cultural identity". Language is also an essential component of culture. Hamers & Blanc (1995) declared "Language is a transmitter of culture and is the main instrument for internalization. Culture must be an integral part of society and our curriculum in school or university courses. For our teachers, it is worth pointing out that learning about a society goes beyond studying a list of historical, musical information.

There are several ways in which L2 learning is influenced by particular social influences. Ellis (2008) suggests that younger learners have been found to be typically more competitive than older learners with respect to age because their identity is less challenged by target-language requirements. Ethnic identity of learners affects learning in a socio-structural model through the relationships in which learners engage. There is no explicit distinction in a post-structural paradigm between ethnic identity and other forms of identity. It regards identity as multiple and dynamic. Learning of identity and language is interrelated, each affecting the other.

Based on a study of Iranian students learning English, a report from Teacher (2015) states that a student's first language and cultural background can be seen to influence the student's second language acquisition. Learning English in Iran is considered a valuable skill and is not seen as a challenge to the dominant identity of the Iranian people. Therefore, there is general incentive to learn the second language. Thus, the first language and cultural backgrounds of these students greatly affect how the students acquire their second language skills. For a variety of factors, a person's identity in their second language would be different from that of their identity in their own language. One of the simpler explanations, especially for language learners, would be that the student lacks the ability to communicate at the same level as in their first language. Such a situation will affect how the students perceive themselves as a speaker of the other language. In Iran, as Asian cultures are seen as "high-face" cultures, in fact, some of the poorer students in some of the classes at university appear to sit at the back of the class and try to avoid participating in activities. The students would also clearly state that they do not understand when asked to participate. However, the reasons for a reluctance to participate may also be due to the inability to interact with teachers and to prevent a risk of failure. Other students often have a good view of themselves based on their ability to proficiently use the second language, which gives the students the ability to communicate openly in the classroom, earning appreciation from the teachers, it also enables students to communicate eagerly. The student gives herself or himself further chances to study and practice the language, continuing the language enhancement process. From the above

example, it may be realized that the language skill of the students would also establish an identification of a 'strong' or 'poor' English speaker for the student. This identity information will lead the student to reinforce this perceived identity as real reality through behavior that would either lead to improving or worsening the English of the students. Barnett (2006) remarks how "imagined communities can help students to invest more in the learning".

Castells (1997) describes the central role of identity: "The quest for identity, collective or person, ascribed or created, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning in a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images." This is not a new development, because since the dawn of human culture, identity, and particularly religious and ethnic identity, have been at the roots of meaning. Yet identity is becoming the primary source of meaning and often the only one. Meaning is expressed by language and identity as the language option is influenced by the root of meaning. Lemke (2002) explores how a second language speaker can take on a new identity as a member of the group of language speakers [12].

Norton (2006) proposed that "there are five common beliefs about identity, underlying most identity-focused SLA research". Identity is complex and changes continuously through time and place, Identity is "complex, multifaceted and contradictory," Language is both a product of identity creation and a method. Identity can only be understood in the sense of relationships and control, much identity-focused SLA research establishes ties to practice in the classroom.

According to Watkins-Goffman (2001), "We are negotiating and renegotiating our identities every time we talk". Language in this view, among other available options for a speaker, such as L1 or L2, dialect, register, style, intonation, it becomes a method for negotiating one's identity or silence.

Methodology

Participants

The present research included twenty advanced learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). All the participants are at the same private language institute in Tehran, and studied English. Their age was within 13-21. Participants are male.

Instruments

The information was gathered by means of focus-group interviews. There were six questions that questioned different issues surrounding Identity, including identity description, identity meaning, and the effects of learning foreign languages on one's identity and the attitudes of learners towards reconstruction of identity by language learning. They were asked to expand on these issues whenever possible during the interview. The interview with the focus group were conducted in Persian to ensure complete understanding of the questions by the interviewees.

Procedure and data analysis

The present research is qualitative, with data obtained through the focus group Interviews that have been tape-recorded for further review. As described before, their interview is in Persian and the transcripts of the interview that appear in this research are their translations into English.

Results

The goal of this research was to explore the way Iranian learners of English define and view identity, the potential effect of learning English on their culture and eventually on their personality and test their attitudes toward such an impact. Language learning thus not only acquires a linguistic code, but also learners learn how to accept a place in a vast social context or take a position. It was simply important for the participants to give their meaning of 'Identity' and how do Iranian EFL learners perceive identity (Question # 1). The following are some definitions:

Interviewee's 1. Identity, in my view is part of my behavior, and skills.

Interviewee 2. Identity is our actions and behaviors. It is our norms and values.

Interviewee3. Identity implies the life of a person. It defines how one lives. Identity varies with the geographical position of the person and the place of living.

Interviewee4. The qualities, beliefs, personality, looks or expressions that make a person.

Interviewee 5. English is the key to everything because everything is related to English nowadays.

The interviewees were asked to reflect on the ways learning of English has affected their identity.

The results were as follows: of the total 20 participants, 14 believed that learning English has impacted their identity. In contrast, 6 interviewees mentioned that learning English did not have any influence on their identity perception.

Interviewee 1. The influence of learning English was positive because it helped me to familiarize myself with other cultures.

Interviewee2. Learning English helped me form a positive mind. I am going to use English a lot in the future, because it is a foreign language.

Interviewee3. When we learn English, we acquire an English identity, we gain English knowledge about English culture.

Interviewee 4. By learning English, we can get to know English-speaking people and their identity better.

Interviewee 5. It has changed my personal behavior and the words I use in my communications with others; in addition, I assume myself having a better identity compared to my original identity.

Interviewee 6. I am worried that I am drifting away from my own culture. Sometimes I even feel embarrassed about not being as fluent in Persian. Having connections with Persian people is also a bit of a challenge because I have found that it is more challenging for me to keep up a conversation in Persian than in English.

Interviewee. 7. I would be able to communicate more easily with people around me in Persian, especially those older than me. I also find that I am able to express myself more easily in Persian.

The participants were questioned regarding their attitudes about in what ways English as a second language shape their cultural identity as modern, educated Iranian individuals. (Question #3). Some of the responses are as follows:

Interviewee1. I was inspired by learning English and trying to understand the meaning of English texts by recognizing their 'English' meaning instead of looking at their translation from Persian.

interviewee2. I have not changed that much, but now I use English and I can get helpful data about other cultures and correct some of my bad habits in my culture [13].

Interviewee 3. Since I started learning English, I have learned that I belong to an outdated society and culture. It does not affect my Iranian culture honestly because I speak Persian at home. I have Iranian friends, I'm in a Persian country, so I see

English as a way to touch a wider range of people, not a limitation.

Interviewee 4. I find it affecting my Iranian culture quite a bit because I am extremely westernized. At least I feel that I have a very different lifestyle compared to other Iranians. I feel fairly distant from Iranian culture.

Interviewee 5. It creates opportunities to involve in conversations but it also influences me negatively. Particularly in official situations with foreigners.

Interviewee 6. Definitely, language is a part of cultural heritage.

How cultures or civilizations perish when their language is forgotten. I think Persian language holds so much history in it and, it is an integral part of Iranian culture and society.

Some participants resisted the reconstruction of identity through English by claiming that they would like to comply with their identity of L1. Norton, (1997, 2011) stated that Social Identity was defined by Norton (1997) as the relationship between the person as mediated by institutions such as families, and the wider social world, Schools, places of work, social care, and courts of law. In fact, people use language to negotiate their identities. A good partnership is one of the fundamental elements of establishing the identity of students in classrooms. When learners treat each other kindly, equally and value each other's different identities, a confidence can be properly established between them. The comfort, kindness, and attention of the teacher will speed up the confidence and relationship of student [14].

Conclusion

In conclusion, English culture can be viewed as their understanding of English as a means of identification. Blind imitation is absorption of the target culture. The optimistic attitudes of Iranian EFL learners toward identity reconstruction in L2 can arguably be seen as an opportunity to experience language learning. Interviewees said they had started Learning English since childhood. Iranian EFL learners found positive attitudes toward the impact that learning English on their identity construction. This can be as a strong motivator and an important predictor of language acquisition. In addition, the vast majority of learners believed that learning English had an influence on how they define their identity.

Learners identify themselves with the target cultural norms. These participants were also critical of what the imposition of western values have on an Islamic country. Motivation and English as an international language have vital role in redefining and reconstructing identity. The findings confirm the role of discursive practices, power with regard to identity reconstruction in the (L2) learning, the inextricable relation between language and social identity and, most significantly, how the negotiation of identity by language learners has influenced their L2 learning in different social contexts. The majority of participants assumed that they could not be themselves in contact with English language. Although the notion of the role of teacher identity has become increasingly relevant in teacher education literature, this has not been taken into account comprehensively among Iranian researchers.

The teacher's position in Iran was merely reduced to an educator and an examiner. Obviously, understanding the identity of the role of language teachers plays a crucial role in the management of the classroom. Language is a way of communication and it explains a lot about ethnicity and nationality of people. Cultural identity and language are not mutually exclusive, but they are derived from a sense of relationship and culture. The reflections of these advanced students demonstrate the different contexts from which people come and how language expresses itself in their respective identities. In our everyday experiences, the control language has over our interactions is immeasurable and clearly illustrated. Our relationships and our beliefs are formed by language, shaping our identity as we grow up speaking it. It is an amazing way to see the world.

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