Abstract

A new perspective on ego identity and language.

Investigating possible relationships of language and ego identity has been ignored to a large extent on the part of language specialists and even psychologists, during the last five decades. In this study, it was supposed that Sapir-Whorf (1956) hypothesis of language relativisms / determinism and /or language universalism theories are highly correlated with Erikson’s (1963) and Marcia’s (1966) theories of ego identity. A stratified purposeful sample of 303 (162 females and 141 males) of Shiraz University and Shiraz Teaching Training Center’s students were selected. The first and the second groups of the participants were studying English and Arabic as a foreign language respectively, and the third group consisted of male and female students of different majors including humanities, engineering and science. The data were collected using a translated version of the Ego identity process questionnaire (EIPQ) (Balistreri, Bush-Rossnagel, Geisinger, 1995). The findings revealed that the first and second groups of participants who were studying English and Arabic as a foreign language respectively, were very similar concerning their ego identity statuses in comparison with the third group. In a large number of ego identity subscales, there were significant differences between the two first groups and the third one. Therefore it seems that foreign language learners, regardless of what language they are, share many interpersonal and ideological characteristics. In short, the findings show more language universalism than language relativism tendencies. In this study, the effects of languages on learners regarding their ego identity were significantly similar. However, in some parts, the results were mixed and more comprehensive studies are required to provide a full picture of EFL learners’ identity traits. The more language specialists and psychologists know learners subjectivities, interests, self-images, emotions and motivations, the better they can equip themselves and their learners with multi-literacy and multi-culturalism in the “new” time (Norton & Toohey 2001).
Introduction

1.0. Introduction

Learning a new language is a tremendously complicated process. Language learners, among many other things, have to deal with a plethora of new factors. Their perspectives toward target language culture, some of whose factors are revealed in L2 learners through language structures, meaning and phonology are one of the most controversial issues which language teachers and students deal with. This leads teachers and other language specialists to look for ways to know their learners' needs and characteristics. The more they know their language learners, the more effective their efforts will be toward intended educational targets. Ego identity is one of those human characteristics that any single step to understand would be tremendously helpful to language teachers and other language specialists. Learning a foreign language may have influences on their learners’ identity. The effects of foreign language may be assimilating and/or dissimulating, in other words, foreign language learners may move toward more or less identical ego identity characteristics or vice versa. Coming to a full picture of these two possibilities would have tremendous effects on language specialists’ efforts to equip their learners with most efficient teaching and testing methodologies. In the case where the impacts of different foreign languages on their learners create more distinguishing outcomes, the findings on teaching and testing methodologies in different languages may not be generalized easily. However, when the influences of languages on their learners are more or less identical, teaching and testing methodologies may be applicable across different languages. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to investigate this issue.

1.1. Review of the Related Literature

Recent studies in SLA have focused attention on the need to better understand language learners' subjectivities, interests, motivations, expectations and needs as a basic requirement for an understanding of the educational implications of the cultural and linguistic differences that are increasingly becoming part of the social features of life in the 21st century (Norton-Peirce & Toohey 2001). At the core of the current thinking in language learning is the assumption that acquisition of knowledge should prepare learners for "new forms of social
participation and link our students' communities, real, virtual, and imagined, with those of their counterparts in other cultures and worlds" (Luke & Elkins 1998, p.6). From this theoretical perspective, teaching ESL and EFL particularly in schools and universities, raise two fundamental issues: the need to understand learners' needs, interests, preferences, values and desires on one hand and on the other hand, the need to reconcile these with the demands of the "New Times," characterized by global electronic forms of communication (Willis, 2003) and intercultural texts and multiple languages” (Lasisi 2006, p.1).

(Lasisi 2006, p.13) further explains that “it is critically important that as educators and researchers, we problematize the issue of "cultural identity, cultural difference, and cultural community”. McCarthy, Motarz & Lasin, et al. (2003) put forth that we search for more effective curriculum and instructional practices that reflect the self-defined images of English language learners. The first step in this direction is a reconceptualization of ESL/EFL learners' identities as students of multilingual resource.

Different language learners learn in different ways. To teach differently to each learner is not so cost effective. If we can come up with some possible comprehensive understanding of a group of language learners who study a particular language and who share some identical characteristics, we may devise methods that suit best to the specific groups needs.

In the mentioned study by Lasisi (2006), the researcher investigated how middle school Hispanic students reconceptualize their identities to negotiate English language learning that ensures the knowledge gained in classrooms prepares them for full participation in their classrooms and communities. The study recommends the need to understand how students construct their identities and how such self-defined images of self, dictate how much students learn in English language learning classrooms. According to Lasisi (2006) understanding identity characteristics of language learners shall bring about fruitful consequences toward ultimate enrichment of both language learners and teachers.

In short, since language methodologies are under the direct influences of psychological and linguistic innovations, any single step toward disclosing language learners’ identity issues may lead both language teachers and learners to more flourishing language settings

1.1.1. Erikson’s (1963) and Marcia’s (1966) theory of ego identity

Marcia's ideas spring from Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Erikson (1958) described eight psychosocial stages of development, each stage consisting of both physical
and psychological development set in a social context. Each stage represents different developmental tasks that we all face during a lifetime (Erikson, 1958, 1963). Erikson viewed identity as built upon childhood identifications but as being more than the sum of these. He describes the process of identity formation as being built upon the childhood processes of introjections and identification—that during childhood we incorporate the image of our parents (or other significant relations) and their roles, values, and beliefs. According to Erikson (1963) our future identity formation requires such introjects and identifications. However, it is not until the individual is able to choose some of those childhood identifications, and discard others, based on her or his interests and values, that identify formation can begin. Erikson (1963) stresses that all the necessary ingredients for an identity are not present until adolescence. At that point in life, great physiological and cognitive changes coincide with growing social expectations. Identity, for Erikson, is the individual's personal organization of experiences of biological and psychological development in relation to the recognitions and regulations the individual receives in the social context.

Marcia (1966) developed the identity status paradigm in an effort to operationally define and empirically investigate Erikson's construct of identity. In interview studies, Marcia found that the participants had different ways of arriving at an identity, and that they displayed diverse outcomes of identity formation (Marcia, 1993). The differences found could be explained with reference to two important processes involved in the formation of an identity, namely exploration and commitment. Based upon the criteria of these processes, Marcia formulated four different identity statuses that describe different ways of forming an identity: Identity Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure, and Identity Diffusion. In figure 1-1 a full picture of the theory is depicted.
Erikson’s (1963) and Marcia’s (1966) theory of ego identity

1.1.2. Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (1956) of language relativity and language determinism.

There are two hypotheses in Whorfian theory; the first one is linguistic determinism. According to this hypothesis, people’s thoughts, perceptions, and memories are determined by the categories and structures made available by language. For example the Inuit can think more intelligently about snow because their language contains more sophisticated and subtle words distinguishing various forms of it. The second hypothesis is that of linguistic relativity. Based on this hypothesis, differences among languages cause differences in thoughts of their speakers. In other words, speakers of different languages necessarily construe the world differently, and are locked into the world view given to them by their language: The “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built on the language habits of the group (Sapir, 1951 [1921]).

1.1.3. Language universalism

Languages all share a common core of universal properties; this is the main tenet of language universal theory that was first put forth by Chomsky (1964). In contrast with language relativism, language universal theory is looking for similarities rather than differences among languages. According to Wierzbicka (2004), one of the advocates of language universal theory, evidence suggests that a set of primes is universal, that is, that they can be found in all languages in the form of specific words or word-like elements. These arguments rely on the innateness of language which says that all human languages obey some rules, which are called universals. It is claimed that the fact that all human languages obey the universals show that they are built-in in the human genetic information, because otherwise languages would diverge.

1.2. Research questions

Since finding possible differences or similarities of ego identity statuses among students who were studying in different majors, is the main objective of the study, it is intended to test the following hypotheses:
1. Is there any significant difference between two groups of students who study English and Arabic as a foreign language with regard to their ego identity?
It should be clarified that the participants’ ego identity shall be measured based on the theoretical framework already mentioned. It means all scales and subscales of ego identity including dimensions, realms and domains are taken into account.

Method

3.0. Introduction

This chapter consists of three sections namely participants, instruments and procedures for data collection and data analysis. In the first section, the number, age, sex and other features related to the participants, are introduced. In the second part, instruments, the tests used to collect data, are described. In the last section, the procedures for data collection and analysis are presented.

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study are 303 (162 females and 141 males) of Shiraz University and Shiraz Teacher Training Center (Shahid Rajayee Center) students who are living in dormitories far from their families. The participants’ age ranges from 18 to 26 with an average of 21.61. All participants of the present study are living in university dormitories, all sleep in the same form of rooms, all are far from their families and the university atmosphere is more or less the same for all of them. The participants, both in Arabic and English, were purposefully selected from different proficiency levels and from among students who are studying in different fields seeking their relevant degrees such as AD, BA and MA. A third group composing of students from different major fields including, humanities, science and engineering was also utilized in the study. It should be mentioned that all the participants were students at the time of the study and none of them obtained their relevant degrees. The complementary information about participants is present in the following tables:
Table 3-1 Participants’ majors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaire

The Ego identity process questionnaire (EIPQ) is the revised and modified version of the Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS) by (Bennion & Adams, 1986). Based on the original version of (EOM-EIS), Ego identity process questionnaire (EIPQ) was revalidated and developed by Balistreri, Bush-Rosnagel, and Geisinger, 1995. In this study, the data were collected using (EIPQ). The final version of EIPQ is composed of 32 items which are randomly ordered across the two dimensions and eight domains. Items that measure commitment are composed of (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23, 25, 29, 31, 32) and those that measure exploration consisted of (3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30). The EIPQ contains 20 positively worded and 12 negatively-worded items. Respondents indicate their degree of agreement to each statement on a 6-point Likert-type scale. In scoring positively stated items “strongly agree” receives 6 points “agree” 5 points “slightly agree” 4 points and so on. Scoring is reversed for negatively-stated items. Item scores are summed to obtain total score for exploration and commitment separately, each of which can range from 16 to 96. Alpha coefficients were reported by Balistreri (1995) 0.75 for commitment and 0.76 for exploration. In another study conducted by Schwartz (2002) on university students in the US, the alpha value for the overall scales was reported 0.68. Respondents’ above the median on both dimensions will be classified as identity achieved, whereas those below classified as identity diffused. Respondents above the median on exploration but below the median on commitment shall be classified as moratorium and those with the reverse pattern will be classified as foreclosure. EIPQ was also validated in Shiraz University Department of Psychology by Samani (2005) and the
reliability was reported 0.84 using test–retest procedure and Alpha 0.91. It should also be mentioned that in order for the researcher to avoid any possible misunderstanding and ambiguity on the part of the participants, the original English version was translated into Persian which is the mother tongue of the all participants. The final version of the translated EIPQ was checked, modified and verified by Samani (2005) and Razmi (2005). A copy of the EIPQ is attached to the appendix of the study.

3.3. Procedure for data collection and data analysis

The researcher attended the relevant colleges to collect the data in person. Having provided sufficient information to participants with regard to the objectives of the study and how the items should be answered, the questionnaires were distributed. The data collected by this procedure later were analyzed by the researcher. Being categorized and codified, the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13. was utilized for data analysis by the researcher. In order to analyze the given data comprehensively, different statistical tests were employed in this study. Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, standard errors of mean etc. were provided in most parts of the results. To find significant differences among variables, one-way ANOVA tests and independent samples t-tests were utilized. In the parts where the results of the one-way ANOVA tests were significant, Scheffe tests of multiple comparisons were employed to pinpoint variables with significant differences precisely.
4.0. Results and Discussions

The outcomes of the study are presented through relevant tables. Then in the second part, discussions of the key findings with regard to the related theories are presented.

Table 4-1 Mean and standard deviation of participants’ commitment and exploration score among students of different majors.

As depicted in table 4-1, the given mean of commitment scores of students who study English as foreign language (EFL Group) and students who study Arabic as a foreign language (AFL Group) is 60.25 and 60.02 respectively. The difference is very minute. But the mean of the third group is higher. The mean of exploration scores of EFL and AFL groups is also very close. However the mean of exploration scores of the “others” is very different. The standard deviations of all three groups are also very close.
Table 4-2 One-way ANOVA of the commitment and exploration scores and major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>825.503</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>412.752</td>
<td>5.661</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>21874.108</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>72.914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22699.611</td>
<td>302</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1604.307</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>802.154</td>
<td>9.913</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>24275.105</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>80.917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25879.413</td>
<td>302</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table 4-2 shows, there is a significant difference between commitment and exploration scores of the three groups of the participants.

Table 4-3 Scheffe tests of multiple comparisons of commitment and exploration among students of three majors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheffe</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>MAJOR</th>
<th>MAJOR</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>-3.2278</td>
<td>1.13171</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-6.019 3.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.27868</td>
<td>1.13171</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-6.019 2.9177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-3.5157</td>
<td>1.26099</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>-6.6178 .4136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>3.2878</td>
<td>1.13171</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>5.038 6.0719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>-1.8642</td>
<td>1.34703</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>-4.178 2.4495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9220</td>
<td>1.19220</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>1.8864 7.2521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5.1835</td>
<td>1.32839</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.9156 8.4514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>-4.3193</td>
<td>1.19220</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-7.2521 .1364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9220</td>
<td>1.19220</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>1.8864 7.2521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

As illustrated by table 4-3, the mean of commitment and exploration scores of EFL and AFL groups are significantly different from the mean of others.
As depicted in the above table, 87.29 percent of the EFL and 89.23 percent of the AFL students are classified as identity achieved while only 82.02 percent of the “others” are categorized in this status. The AFL group has the most identity-diffused students. In the EFL group, the percent of the identity moratorium is the most, and finally the “other” has the most identity foreclosed participants which are highly above the total percent of identity foreclosure. In a nutshell, the EFL and the AFL group enjoy similar patterns regarding their identity statuses.

### 4.1. Discussions

#### 4.1.1. Major fields of study and ego identity

In this study, two groups of students studying English and Arabic as foreign languages (EFL and AFL respectively) were compared with regard to their ego identity to a third group that were students form different major fields. The findings revealed that the EFL and the AFL group were very similar regarding ego identity status and different from the third group.

Concerning general commitment scores, both EFL and AFL groups had a mean of 60, while the “others” group’s mean was 63. One way –ANOVA test showed that the mean difference of the “others” were significantly different form EFL and AFL groups. In other commitment subscales such as value, religious and ideological commitment, the differences between the two first groups and the third one were significant. Regarding friendship exploration the differences between the EFL and the “Other” are significant.

In exploration part, the mean of the third group,” others”, was significantly lower than the rest. Regarding exploration, in occupational exploration domain, the difference between the AFL and the third group was significant. Concerning value exploration domain, the

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Table 4-19 Descriptive statistics of major and identity statuses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Identity Achieved</th>
<th>Identity Diffused</th>
<th>Identity Moratorium</th>
<th>Identity Foreclosed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Percen t</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Freq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
differences between the EFL and AFL groups and the third one was also significant. Difference between the EFL and AFL concerning ideological exploration was also significant. The other classification of ego identity is that of identity achieved, moratorium, diffused and foreclosure. In this regard the differences between the two first groups and the third one were detected salient. Almost 18% of third group was categorized in identity foreclosure level while this amount was 6 and 4 percent for EFL and AFL respectively.

In a nutshell, regarding most ego identity dimensions (commitment and exploration), realms (interpersonal and ideological), and ego identity domains (occupational, religious, political, value, family, sex roles, dating and friendship) the differences between EFL\EFL and the third group were significant or near significant. In spite of serious lack of literature, the researcher believes that the consistency of ego identity of two groups of foreign language learners is mainly because of similarity of the language learning nature and processes. For both languages, learners go through very similar steps that lead them toward maturity both in language command and personality traits.

According to the findings of the study, it seems that languages have important effects on their learners; however, these effects are not distinguishing but more assimilating ones. In spite of drastic differences between English and Arabic languages, learners still share many learning strategies, motivation patterns and self images. Yoder (2000) believes that social cognitions of adolescent’ self include three major aspects: A) knowledge of the self B) knowledge of the others and C) knowledge of the self in relation to others. In spite of the interpersonal and inner- psychological developments, ego identity formation is shaped and tuned up in social context. Therefore, it seems that language learners are exposed to more or less similar contexts in both in language classrooms, and out-of-class interactions.

Flum& Blustien (2000,p2) believe that “vocational exploration fosters awareness of one’s internal attributes and knowledge about one’s educational and vocational options, and thereby facilitating the establishment of coherent career plans and a personally meaningful work life”. Language learners, although with different quantities of job opportunities, are faced with very similar situations, concerning their future jobs. Most of them will involve in teaching and translation careers. So it is relevant to observe that their vocational domains of ego identity go parallel to a large extent. Flum& Blustien (2000) further explains that vocational exploration and commitment has direct and indirect effective and cognitive feedbacks on people. Language learners constantly receive and project feedbacks from and to their peers and social-vocational contexts. This mutual give-and-take may lead learners to frustration or sadness or the reverse state of mind which is happiness and prosperity. In other words,
identity development is an interactive process of person-context transactions that regarding foreign language learners, the language itself is the mediator means of interpersonal and ideological assimilation among learners.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1: EIPQ, English version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Points</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I have defiantly decided on the occupation I want to pursue.
2. I don’t expect to change my political principles and ideals.
3. I have considered adopting different kinds of religious beliefs.
4. There has never been a need to question my values.
5. I m very confident about what kinds of friends are best for me.
6. My ideas about men’s and women’s roles have never changed as I become older.
7. I will always vote for the same political party.
8. I have firmly held views concerning my role in my family.
9. I have engaged in several discussions concerning behaviors involved in dating relationship.
10. I have considered different political views thoughtfully.
11. I have never questioned my views concerning what kinds of friends is best for me.
12. My values are likely to change in the future.
13. When I talk to the people about religion, I am sure to voice my opinion.
14. I m not sure what type of dating relationship is best for me.
15. I have not felt the need to reflect upon the importance I place on my family.
16. Regarding religion, my beliefs are likely to change in the near future.
17. I have defined views regarding the ways in which men and women should behave.
18. I have tried to learn about different occupational fields to find the best one for me.
19. I have undergone several experiences that made me change my views on men’s and woman’s roles.
20. I have consistently re-examined many different values in order to find the ones which are best for me.
22. I have questioned what kind of date is right for me.
23. I m unlikely to alter my vocational goals.
24. I have evaluated many ways in which I fit in to my family structure.
25. My ideas about men’s and women’s roles will never change.
26. I have never questioned my political views.
27. I have had many experiences that led me to review the qualities that I would like my friends to have.
28. I have discussed religious matters with a number of people who believe differently than I do.
29. I m not sure that the values that I hold are right for me.
30. I have never questioned my occupational aspirations.
31. The extent to which I value my family is likely to change in the future.
32. My beliefs about dating are firmly held.