

Language Ego as An Affective Factor Influencing Second Language Acquisition in the Learning Process: A Literature Review

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Highlights

The higher the learner's language ego permeability is, the higher the learner's chance of successful second language acquisition is.

ABSTRACT: Real-life observation has shown that second language (L2) learners differ in their L2 learning in which this individual difference is closely related to the factors influencing second language acquisition. Many researchers have been interested in finding those factors, yet there is still a little study examining the impact of language ego as the affective factor. Thus, this paper aims to elaborate on how the language ego influences second language acquisition. By having a thorough understanding of language ego in L2 learning, it is expected that it can give some enlightenment to a better L2 learning. To provide an adequate explanation of language ego, this research used a literature review method. This method is used to aggregate empirical findings related to the research question which is the language ego as one of the affective factors influencing second language acquisition. Some previous studies that discuss the similar topic were collected, and the data were analyzed in accordance with the objective of this research. The research findings showed that the language ego affects the L2 acquisition through stimulating perception and emotion toward the learning process. The permeability shows how the ego can be flexible and adaptable to the second language. The higher the learner's language ego permeability is, the higher the learner's chance of successful second language acquisition is.

Keywords: affective factors, language ego permeability, learning process, second language acquisition

Introduction

Language ego can be defined as a person's identity towards language. Since it is identity, it includes the personal perception, the emotions, and the attitudes of a person in recognizing and using a language. According to Brown (2007), language ego is a learner's identity including the mode of thinking, feeling, and acting towards any aspect of a language. Guiora et al. (1980)

stated that a language ego emerges and gradually develops in someone's personality when he/she learns and uses a language. In second language acquisition, the second language ego is formed which refers to the new identity when one learns and uses a second language. When learning a second language, learners in general are more likely to gain new experiences starting from the language features to the manner of speech which they have not encountered when learning their native language. These experiences eventually stimulate the second language ego development.

In second language acquisition, some L2 learners may have a positive language ego that can assist them to acknowledge the differences between their native language and second language while others who have negative language ego may perceive it to be a threat and challenge to their native language ego. This perception is constructed depending on the language ego permeability. The permeability of the language ego refers to the extent to which new experiences, cultural features, or perceptions of second language acquisition can pass the defense of one's language identity (Dewaele & Wei, 2012), so the language ego can be flexible and adapt (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

The ignorance of language ego in the learning process is more likely to make an adverse impact on second language acquisition. As it is explained above, the native language ego can feel threatened with the second language due to the differences in language mode, and learners will be anxious and resistant to engaging in the L2 (second language) communication. This case exists when the learning process does not provide supportive learning environments to develop language ego. Thus, the learner's language ego deteriorates which can bring failure to L2 acquisition (Guiora et al., 1972; Guiora et al., 1980).

The language ego that is considered a factor influencing second language acquisition has been studied in recent decades. One of those studies is the research conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2008) that aimed to examine a hypothesis that the degree of accent in L2 is related to a measure of ego permeability. He examined the correlations between the "heaviness" of the accent of L2 speakers and a measure of empathy in relation with language ego permeability. According to Guiora (1994), the empathy in second language has positive relationship with the language ego permeability. The participants in his research were Native Hebrew speakers, native Russian speaking immigrants, and Arabic-speaking Israeli natives. The L2 in his study was Hebrew since all the participants were students at the University of Haifa, where the language of instruction was Hebrew. In his study, Ibrahim (2008) found the relationship between empathy and L2 acquisition related to the accent. The lower the Russian-speaking immigrants' empathy toward Hebrew language, the higher the degree of their mother tongue accent when they speak Hebrew.

In other research, Keeley (2014) was aimed to find the role of self-identity and ego permeability in foreign culture adaptation and acquisition. The research was carried out with 86 Chinese students who were studying in Japanese at Kyushu Sangyo University in Fukuoka, Japan. Since Japanese was the language of the instruction there, the L2 studied in his study was Japanese. His study focused on the oral performance in L2 learning. The research findings indicated that there is a strong positive relationship between the language ego permeability and oral performance of second language learning. When the learner's language ego is permeable to the second language, he/she is willing to mimic native speakers of the target language.

The other researcher, Zakarneh (2018) investigated how language ego acts as a barrier to second language acquisition. In his study, he tried to explain the concept of language ego and how it affects students in second language learning. The participants in his study are 98 Arab learners studying English in three universities in three different Arab countries. The L2 in his study was English since it was the language of instruction in those universities. His research findings showed that the Arab students were afraid of making mistakes when they speak English and find it difficult to mimic the target language due to their mother tongue accent.

Despite the fact that some researchers had conducted similar studies related to the language ego, it is essential to explore how the language ego affects second language acquisition. There have been many studies discussing the factors influencing second language acquisition, yet little has focused on a specific element of affective factors which is language ego. In fact, some studies commonly proposed motivation (Dörnyei & MacIntyre, 2015; Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Williams et al., 2015), anxiety (Williams et al., 2015), and willingness to communicate (WTC) (Ellis, 2015; Yashima et al., 2018) as the affective factors.

Based on the brief explanation above, this research focuses on a specific affective factor, namely language ego. In this research, how language ego affects second language acquisition is provided. It is expected that this research can give a thorough understanding of language ego in L2 learning so that the language ego of learners will be more acknowledged for a better learning process.

Methodology

To provide an adequate explanation of language ego, this paper used a literature review, specifically systematic literature review. A literature review can broadly be described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Tranfield et al., 2003). One of the existing guidelines for conducting literature review is systematic literature review. According to Liberati et al. (2009), systematic review can be defined as a research method and process to identify and critically appraise relevant previous studies, as well as to collect and to analyze the data from them.

The systematic review method is used to aggregate empirical findings related to a narrow research question which is the language ego as one of the affective factors influencing second language acquisition. Some previous studies that discuss the similar topic are collected. The data, then, is analyzed in accordance with the research question of this paper which is how the language ego affects the second language acquisition.

Findings

There are some previous studies related to the language ego in second language acquisition that are collected on this paper. They are the research conducted by Keeley (2014), Zakarneh (2018), Ibrahim et al. (2008), Baran-Łucarz (2012), Alavinia & Salmasi (2012), Dewaele & Wei (2012), Schumann (1975), and Brown & Lee (2015). Keeley (2014) conducted research to find the role of self-identity and ego permeability in foreign culture adaptation and acquisition. The research was carried out with 86 Chinese students who were studying in

Japanese at Kyushu Sangyo University in Fukuoka, Japan. Since Japanese was the language of the instruction there, the L2 studied in his study was Japanese. His study focused on the oral performance in L2 learning. In his study, it is concluded that there is a strong positive relationship between the language ego permeability and oral performance of second language learning. The higher the language ego permeability the learner has, the higher the chance he/she has in successful second language acquisition. When the learner's language ego is getting permeable to the second language, he/she is willing to mimic native speakers of the target language. Eventually, the learner has sufficient confidence in his/her language ability, specifically speaking since the L2 accent causes the identity issue due to the difference from the mother tongue. Thus, by making the language ego permeable, the learner is more likely to succeed in second language acquisition.

The other researcher, Zakarneh (2018) investigated how language ego acts as a barrier to second language acquisition. In his study, he tried to explain the concept of language ego and how it affects students in second language learning. The participants in his study are 98 Arab learners studying English in three universities in three different Arab countries. The L2 in his study was English since it was the language of instruction in those universities. His research found that the language ego influences the learners' perceptions and the language aptitude of the second language. In his research, Zakarneh categorized two kinds of language ego that are the thick and the thin in which it is related to the permeability. The learners who have thick language ego has negative perception toward the second language in which it makes them reluctant to learn English. In Zakarneh's research, the Arab students were afraid of making mistakes when they speak English. They were also more likely to feel uncomfortable with role-playing. They find it difficult to mimic the target language due to their mother tongue accent. Anxious of being misinterpreted, they tend to avoid expressing themselves in English. This also caused them to have low language aptitude. Thus, all these negative perceptions due to the thick language ego is likely to make the learners difficult to acquire second language.

Ibrahim et al. (2008) also investigated the language ego. He tried to examine a hypothesis that the degree of accent in L2 is related to a measure of ego permeability. He examined the correlations between the "heaviness" of the accent of L2 speakers and a measure of empathy in relation with language ego permeability. The participants in his research were Native Hebrew speakers, native Russian-speaking immigrants, and Arabic-speaking Israeli natives. The L2 in his study was Hebrew since all the participants were students at the University of Haifa, where the language of instruction was Hebrew. In his study, he found that there was a strong negative relationship between the Russian-speaking immigrants' degree of accent and empathy. The lower their empathy toward Hebrew language, the high the degree of their mother tongue accent when they speak Hebrew. The empathy in second language is influenced by the language ego in which the higher the language ego permeability, the higher the empathy to accept the new culture and linguistics of the second language. However, this result was not found on Arabic-speaking ethnic minority. It was assumed that this happened because they were exposed to Hebrew in many situations (e.g., TV programs and individual contacts) throughout their childhood which was different with Russian-speaking immigrants. Moreover, it might also happen due to their status of being minority. In summary, it can be

concluded that the language ego in relation with empathy can influence the oral performance of second language.

Baran-Łucarz (2012) conducted research to find the relationship between the thickness of ego boundaries (the opposite of ego permeability) and attainments in FL pronunciation after a clearly structured form-focused practical course of phonetics. The participant in her study were 45 first-year students at the Institute of English Studies in Wrocław, Poland. His finding showed that there was no significant relationship between the ego boundaries and the foreign language pronunciation. It is assumed that it happened because of the structured form-focused practical course of phonetics. The learners had already learned and practiced the pronunciation on the course. Baran-Łucarz also assumed it might give different result if there was no phonetics course, or the course was not clear and unstructured. However, she also found a weak positive correlation emerged between pronunciation scores and a boundary in some aspects of the ego boundary. Those were representing “the subjects’ attitudes towards accepting objects, concepts and situations that lack clear borders”.

Alavinia & Salmasi (2012) research also studied the language ego permeability as a part of language attitude. His study is precisely aimed to find the correlation between the shyness level and the attitudes toward language learning, and one of the subsets of the language learning attitudes is language ego permeability. The participant in his study were 104 institute Iranian EFL learners. The result of his study showed that there was no significant relationship between the language ego permeability and shyness level. Dewaele & Wei (2012) in their research investigated the correlation between multilingualism and the personality trait of cognitive empathy among 2158 monolinguals, bilinguals, trilingual, and multilinguals. The empathy they analyzed is closely related to the language ego since the permeability of the ego causes the empathy. In their research, he found that the cognitive empathy did not have any significant correlation with the bi-/trilingual. Dewaele & Wei (2012) suggested that to increase one’s empathy toward language, the presence of two (or three) languages/cultures in the home environment is still not sufficient. However, their research showed a contrary finding for the multilinguals. There was a positive relationship between the empathy and the multilingual. The higher the empathy of a multilingual, the higher the multilingualism he/she has. Schumann (1975) in his paper of literature review about the affective factors and problem of age in second language acquisition explained the language ego. He stated that empathic capacity or ego permeability which is particularly as operationalized under the concept of “lowering of inhibitions,” is best regarded as an essential factor in the overall ability to acquire a second language rather than simply in the ability to acquire an authentic pronunciation since everyone has the language ego, and it shows the language ‘identity’. He also stated that the language ego is one of crucial factor in second language acquisition. The permeability of language ego or the ego flexibility is needed when an L2 learner learns a second language. However, interestingly, the contact with that language and its culture cause the ego to become rigid. Thus, Schuman suggested the importance of concerning the language ego in second language acquisition.

Brown & Lee (2015) in their book “Teaching by Principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy” stated that the language ego can cause the learners to have “a sense of fragility, a defensive, and a raising of inhibitions”. The sense of fragility is felt when a learner thinks he/she cannot accept the difference between the native language and the second language

culturally and linguistically, so the learner is likely to be anxious. The inhibition showed the set of defenses built to protect oneself, so the learner may reluctant and avoid using the language due to fear of making mistakes. Thus, the language ego may cause the learner to experience an identity crisis.

Discussion

After the data are analyzed, it is found that the language ego can affect the learners in acquiring the second language, especially in speaking. According to Keeley (2014), when the language ego permeability of a learner is high, the acquisition of second language is more likely to be successful. The learner is willing to mimic the native speakers of the second language. He/she will try to speak as similarly as possible with the natives. Meanwhile, when the learner has a thick language ego in which the permeability is low, he/she tend to avoid speaking in the target language (Zakarneh, 2018). These findings are closely related to Edward's statement about language and identity in his book. He stated that "language and identity are ultimately inseparable" in which when someone speaks or writes, he/she mostly unconsciously shows his/her identity and culture (Edwards, 2013). It is assumed that the language ego influences the L2 acquisition in speaking because the differences between the L2 and the native language trigger the language ego. In speaking L2 the learners need to produce the language that contains different linguistics aspects from their native language, including the accent and pronunciation. This is supported by Schumann in his books. When a learner contacts with the language, his/her language ego tends to become rigid (Schumann, 1975). Hence, the higher the permeability of their language ego, the bigger the willingness of accepting the differences in which it will lead the learners to succeed in L2 acquisition.

The language ego affects the speaking ability of the learners in their L2 acquisition by generating perceptions and emotions toward the L2. Since the linguistics and even the cultures aspects in L2 highly differ from the native language, the language ego can stimulate the perception toward themselves in learning and using L2. When the learner's permeability of the language ego is low, he/she is more likely to have negative perception and emotions. According to Zakarneh's research finding, the L2 learners who had thick language ego found it difficult to mimic English because of their mother tongue accent (Zakarneh, 2018). They also thought that they were easily misinterpreted due to their accent, so they try to avoid expressing themselves in English whether it was speaking or writing. This also caused them afraid of making mistakes when using the L2. They also did not like role-playing. This finding is in accordance with Brown & Lee's statement (2015). They said the language ego stimulate a learner to have "a sense of fragility, a defensive and a raising of inhibitions". When the language ego is high, the learner tends to be more reluctant to learn and use L2. They may hardly accept the linguistics aspects of the L2, especially the accent and the pronunciation.

The permeability of the language ego is closely related to the empathy in L2 acquisition. According to Guiora (1994), the empathy in second language has positive relationship with the language ego permeability. The more permeable the language ego is, the higher the empathy is. Based on the research findings of Ibrahim et al. (2008) and Dewaele & Wei (2012), there was a negative correlation between the empathy and the L2 acquisition. In his study, Ibrahim found this relationship in relation with the accent. The lower the Russian-speaking immigrants'

empathy toward Hebrew language, the high the degree of their mother tongue accent when they speak Hebrew. It means that the high permeability of language ego which causes the high empathy can stimulate the learner's willingness to mimic the pronunciation of L2 when they speak. It also means that they are more likely to accept the differences which assists them to acquire the L2. In addition, Dewaele & Wei (2012) found that there was a positive relationship between the empathy and the multilingual. The higher the empathy of a multilingual, the higher the multilingualism he/she has. It means that the higher the permeability of language ego, the higher the willingness to accept multilingualism including a second language.

Based on the findings on the data, it is also found an interesting result. The language ego does not affect the acquisition when the learners have already been exposed to sufficient exposure in their environment. According to Ibrahim et al. (2008) and Baran-Łucarz (2012) Baran-Łucarz, when a learner has got a lot of L2 exposure whether it is unconsciously or consciously, their language ego does not affect their acquisition. The Arabic-speaking ethnic minority in Ibrahim et al. study (2008) is one of the pieces of evidence. They were exposed to Hebrew in many situations (e.g., TV programs and individual contacts) throughout their childhood which was different with Russian-speaking immigrants, so there was no correlation between their language ego and L2 acquisition which gave different result from the Russian-speaking immigrants. This is also found in Baran-Łucarz's study (2012) because the learners had the structured form-focused practical course of phonetics. These findings show that the learners eventually got continuous L2 exposure when the language ego does not have any impact.

Conclusion

To sum up, the language ego can influence the second language acquisition, especially in using the L2 such as speaking. The way the language ego affects the L2 acquisition is through stimulating perception and emotion toward the learning process. When the permeability of language ego is low, the learner is more likely to have negative perceptions and emotions such as fear of making mistakes and being misinterpreted, and have difficulty of speaking in L2 because of the first language accent. Furthermore, the permeability language ego influences the empathy of accepting the L2 through positive relationship. However, the language ego does not affect the learners in acquiring L2 if they are exposed to sufficient L2 exposure in their environment. It does not influence their accent degree and their pronunciation in using L2.

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