The relationship among language, culture and thought and There addition to a variety of gestures, rituals and paralinguistic features- A study

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Abstract

Learning a language is as crucially dependent on factors within learners as it is upon those without. People do not learn a language which is not available to them either in visual, auditory or some other forms. What do learners learn, how they learn, what the role of social factors in their learning is and what is the role of individual factors in the learning; all these are very interesting questions in the field of second language acquisition. Language learning or acquisition both are synonymous words in recent years. But second language acquisition is a different process from the first language learning, because human beings are genetically prepared for having the full fledged idea of their first language which is innate by nature, but un-consciously second language is acquired by them depending upon their various socio-cultural learning situations mediated by media, which is taking place through dialogue, with classroom discourse, reflecting the history, cultural values and social practices of children's schools and communities.

Keywords: 1.Children and media, 2.Popular Culture, 3.Socio-cultural approach of L2 learning, 4.Second language learning.

The relationship among language, culture and thought is very eternal in nature. There is no doubt that in addition to a variety of gestures, rituals and paralinguistic features, verbal language remains a main source of cultural transmission and cognitive structures. The capacity to successfully use language requires one to acquire a range of tools including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and an extensive vocabulary. Learning a language is not only dependent on learner factors but also on the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors irrespective of individual differences. People do not learn a language which is not available to them either in visual, auditory or some other forms. What learners learn, how they learning, what the role of social factors in their learning is and how the individual factors be the essential part in their learning; all these are very interesting questions in the field of second language acquisition. Acquisition is the product of a subconscious process very similar to other process, children undergo, when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language or natural communication, in which speakers concentrate not on the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. „Learning" on the other hand, provides conscious knowledge about the target language depending upon their various socio-cultural learning situations. The socio-cultural theorists, which started with the works of Vygotsky believes that the way the children learn is by internalizing the activities, habits, vocabulary and ideas of the members of community in which they grow up. The socio-cultural environment presents the children with variety of tasks and demands and engages the child in his world through the psychological tools. So, child's behavior is mediated by such psychological tool i.e. language which has a cultural significance and learned through

social-interaction. Parents, friends, peers and the use of modern day media as the representative of culture and the conduit through which the culture passes into the child, actualize the instructions primarily through language. Thus, second language cannot be even acquired or understood in isolation of the socio-cultural contexts of learner and the language itself is somehow responsible in framing the second language identity of L2 learners. The cognitive view of language acquisition is credited by the work of Chomsky (1965) who proposed that language is not learned as a form of behavior, it is acquired as a set of grammatical rules. He also hypothesized Language Acquisition Device (LAD) for the children that can enable them to create syntactically appropriate utterances prior to imitation and repetition. But it is also true that the students learn more easily when they can manipulate situations rather than use abstract thought. This manipulation is mostly seen among the children of 7-12 years of age who are in concrete operational stage. They can separate appearance from reality which is not possible in sensory-motor or pre-operational stage where there is no proper development of demarcations seen in them. In concrete operational stage children able to perform more elaborative cognitive activates including language learning from television. Albert Bandura (1977) also argued that human behaviour is not learned from effects of our own actions rather observed others who model certain behaviour and the consequences they experience as a result.

Mass-media can be briefly characterized as an institutionalized process encompassing the production, dissemination, reception and interpretation of socio-cultural discourses. It has been seriously taken the place of such socio-cultural aspects which surrounds us and the media language is become the part of our daily communicative processes In recent years the emergence of a range of new electronic media and information technologies is heralding a partial convergence of mass-mediated and inter-personal forms of communication, as the mass-media become more dialogic and the new fora of inter-personal communication emerge on the internet. But recently this concern has extended to other electronic screen media, including cartoon movies, serials and video game consoles which somehow dominate the young minds. As technologies increasingly saturate daily experience, children need to express themselves fluently using multiple media (e.g., text, video, graphic design, sound), to use those media to navigate across multiple platforms. It also allows them to retrieve and process immense quantities of information by covering several uncovering facts and enable them as the competent language learner and also user by producing their own jargons. Moreover, the exact amount of translation is not possible through it but somehow it allows them to understand the facts and events by positively influencing their mind and behaviour.

Significance of the study

The study is seen significant in understanding the second language acquisition process where target language of L2 learners may not be the English language but the language which is majorly used by them depending upon their various socio-cultural milieus. The objectives of teaching English in Hindi speaking states and Hindi in Non-Hindi speaking states, as the second language in the respective states of India have to be formulated in the light of how we perceive our needs for second language to be in a multilingual setting at both the national and individual level. English in India also becoming a part of its linguistic and cultural variations. The goal for second language-curriculum is also two folded: attainment of basic proficiency, such as, acquired in natural language learning and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through literacy. At the initial stages, English may be one of the languages for learning activities that creates the child's awareness of the world. At later stages, all learning happens through transfer of higher order linguistic skills, such as, speaking skill and writing skill.

Digital media powerfully affect young people of all ages, but existing research and efforts will be tended to focus on younger and older kids, leaving a gap in knowledge and programming related to children ages 12 to 15, the "middle childhood" period. It is during this stretch of time that children typically take giant steps into

the world that lies beyond family and home, grapple with literacy and numeracy, and continue to build the store of words and ideas that they will need to profit from reading throughout their lives. But how this modern day's "visually oriented society" is impacting upon the learning styles of young learners is a growing concern of the nation and also becoming the raising interest area of blooming researchers. Study of Leppink (2010) on the role of media input in second language acquisition tried to explore English (L2) language proficiency of two groups of Dutch secondary school students, where one group consisted of students who indicated to receive little English input from the media and the other group indicated a much larger quantity of English media input. Comparing the results of the two test groups could provide an answer to the experimental hypothesis that media input does positively affect second language acquisition. Another study of Kuppens (2009) on incidental foreign language acquisition from media exposure investigates the extent to which children's foreign language skills benefit from their long-term consumption of media. An empirical study conducted in the Flemish(Dutch-speaking) area of Belgium compared the self-reported use of three English language media by 374 pupils in the last year of primary education with their scores on two oral translation tests; one from Dutch to English and one vice versa. Two general linear model analyses of variance reveal that pupils who frequently watch subtitled English television programs and movies perform significantly better on both tests. Interestingly, the effect of watching subtitled television and movies is stronger with girls than with boys. Furthermore, playing English computer games positively influences the test scores on the English–Dutch test.

Media technologies, such as video, audio, and computer software, have increasingly found their way to foreign language classrooms, and several studies have testified to their value as language learning materials and provide learners with appealing samples of authentic language, to reinforce their confidence, and to increase their language proficiency. (e.g. Bueno 2009; Markham and Peter 2003; Neri et al. 2008; Ranalli2008; Tschirner 2001; Williams and Thorne 2000, as cited in kuppens, 2009). Hustson and Wright (1983) also proposed a somewhat different theory of attention to television that drive children's attention may change as child ages. Specifically, they claimed that in infancy, perceptually salient features of television such as movement and sound effects drive attention. With age and experience, however, children are less influenced by perceptual salience and are able to pay greater attention to informative features such as dialogue and narrative and ultimately be the good users of media (as sited in Kirkorian et al, 2008). Moreover this study will try to stimulate a new dialogue about the potential of digital media to promote learning for young children. The researches highlighted here are an intended starting point to better understand how children are growing up today. The concerned study poses four broad objectives that must be understood if we are to unleash the educational and developmental power of digital media.

Research questions
- Is media really being the part of today's culture that children are paying more attention towards it?
- Can digital media motivate children to read more?
- Does prolonged exposure to cartoon movies and animated programmes enhance the second language acquisition in L2 learners?
- Does the thinking process of L2 learners is seen through their speech acts?
- Does the speaking ability of L2 learners enhance due to media exposure?

Objectives
- To find out how media be an essential component of today's culture.
- To find out how children's thinking process are being dominated by the use of media.
- To find out how second language learning of L2 learner is affected by media exposure.
- To find out how the speaking abilities of L2 learners are affected by media exposure.

Methodology

The study was mainly based on the children of 10-14 years who were in their critical age of learning. The children of this age were in a transition stage between early childhood stage to adolescence stage where they were more curious and attentive to know everything. They had also developed implicit communicative practices and incorporated aspects of popular culture in their work. The nature of the study was qualitative and the data were descriptive in order to observe life issues of children related to their media world and language learning. The pilot study was conducted on four children and their parents, but the main study was consisted of 17 children along with their 17 parents, 7 school teachers, and 2 tuition teachers. The multiple case-study method was used to deal with some groups of children consisted of 17 children according to their interest areas, their nature, and closeness of residences. The tools used for data collection were observation, semi-structured and open ended questionnaires and semi-structured interview with children, and semi-structured discussion with parents and teachers.

The pilot was done with four children. Initially I thought that younger children were a better source of getting information about the use of media, but after talking to them the notion changed as they were unable to answer as per the demand of the study. So, it was decided to do work with the children aged between 11-14 years. Out of them two were studying in 9th class, one in 8th class and one in 6th class. All of them were studying in English medium school, out of which two were in Government English medium school and other two were in private English medium school. The data was collected through qualitative procedures like face to face interaction and discussion with each children and discussion their parents; and covert observation by recording the processes of groups and sometimes single child. Here, data analysis would be done through comparing the responses of children, parents and teachers and making out points from them. Video recordings were qualitatively analyzed for getting the idea about children who were watching movie *I am Kalam*.

Main study

In the main study 17 children, 17 parents, 7 school teachers, and 2 tuition teachers were taken. By the procedure of purposive sampling a sample of 17 children were taken from both urban and semi-urban areas of Hyderabad studying in 7th, 8th and 9th standard of 11-14 years of age of 4 different schools. Out of 17 children 10 were Telugu speaking, 4 were Tamil and 3 were Kannada. All of them were studying in English medium school, out of which five were from Government English medium school namely Kendriya Vidyalaya Campus School, two were from Bharatiya Vidya bhavana, three from private English medium school namely Delhi Public School; and three from Oakridge English medium school. From teachers four were from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavana and three were from Kendriya Vidyalaya Campus School.The data was collected through same procedure used in the pilot study like face to face interaction, open ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, covert observation and discussion with each children and discussion with their parents and teachers; and covert observation of children. The interviews were conducted in different phases and time of 17 children for having better understanding of the situation and variations in result. During analysis of data the life issues of 17 children were described in details along with the responses of their parents and teachers. Their responses were analyzed under certain sub-headings raised after comparing their responses with their parents and teachers in one part; and in other part the responses of children were analyzed according to their family structures and demands like family having more autonomy and family having less autonomy.

Personal Insight

So far the development of my understanding through the study, I came to know about the parents who were caring and aspirant persons having flexible opinions about their children's media world, though some of them were very traditional and particular in their views. All the seven teachers were also asserting similar views regarding the children's media usage as that of parents. However, the views of tuition teachers (two) were very open, realistic and seem in the support of modern contemporary trend such as textese, SMS language, media exposure, provided the things are utilized in correct manner. It was also emerged from the study that the families who gave less freedom to their children, they liked to spend much of their time in their fantasize media world without sharing anything to others whereas the children of the families who had very less or nominal autonomy upon them were more social and like to share everything with their parents, family members and friends.

However there were variations in children's choice, as the children of little younger age liked to watch cartoons or any other programmes and also liked to read such story books which were known for producing fun and humor. Their loving characters were *Tom and Jerry* (cat and mouse), *Cheap and Dale* (squirrels), *Donald duck* (duck) and Scooby Doo (Dog), which were about any animal or creatures and also the cartoon character of their age like *Ninja Hatthori* (who was a lazy guy and don't want to go school like Sweta) whereas, the children of little older age liked to watch little complex and logical things and appreciated the themes of fiction, love, crime and justice in their reading materials and also television contents like from the series of *Percy Jackson* and *Harry Potter*. Similarly, girls preferred to watch family dramas and soap operas, whereas the boys liked the programmes like, *FIFA, NBA*, fighting shorts, problem solving tricks and target oriented video games which were probably not the choice of girls. Thus, the children's interpretations, perceptions, and thoughts about media world appeared to be deeply rooted in the larger discursive culture and the media socialization practices in which they participate. Everyday conversations and discourse about media content along with verbal exchanges around the television sets, made the children's interpretation of television content and of the media itself. Furthermore, it helped in enhancing several linguistic skills among the children by enabling their knowledge in some other languages like Greek, Chinese, Italian, and also English and Hindi of Telugu, Tamil and Kannada speaking children.

Major findings

Media usages enriched the stock of words among children. It improved the grammatical abilities among children like helping verbs; can, will, may and adverbs yesterday, tomorrow, etc and supportive words like sorry, please, thank you, *namestey*, etc. Words in new forms, contracted words, unnatural words having regular meanings used by the characters were commonly seen among children.

It improved the reading habits of children by enhancing their interests in extra reading materials like comics related with their favourite programmes. Thus, it enhanced only receptive skills of language such as reading and listing leads to speaking abilities along with several communicative skills. From this children were also doing mimicry of their favourite characters and also showing several non-verbal cues. They acquired vocabulary from different languages like English and Hindi; and foreign languages like Greek, Latin and Chinese. 70% were learning English, 29% were learning Hindi and 1% was learning other languages. Media becomes a part of popular culture in today's life and adopted as media culture by today's generation. Media helps children in out of school learning through incidental language learning. Language learning was taking place in joyful environment because of the multi-modal and multi-sensory environment created by media contents. Code-mixing, code-switching and translation from mother tongue to other tongue were commonly seen among children. Media acts as an extra-linguistic aspect helps in second language classroom as a resource for language learning. Media sometimes create aggression among children who spent much time

with it and they were taken away from traditional beliefs also. Children who were getting more freedom in their families were taking less interest in media contents and like to spend more time with their family members whereas children who were getting less freedom in their family were showing more interest in media contents and liked to spent time in their virtual world. Media sometime had taken the place of parents and siblings who have no time to spend with their children. Children also adopted several non-verbal cues and behaviours from different media exposures. Some observations taken from the pilot study while watching the movie *I am Kalam*;

- While describing events of the movie among the friends children were using several key words like *bhatti, bhutni, chotu*, etc with same pronunciations done in the movie by making different facial expressions.
- They used certain words such as *haddi pahalwan* and referred to clues such as dress, casting, performance, etc while doing mimicry of the characters after watching the movie.
- They were also producing different sounds like *Hoo…Hoo* for producing ghostly effects by showing non-verbal cues like, closing of eyes and tightening of hand.

Conclusion

The study has extensively summarised the life issues of children in relation to their media world and second language learning. The study was intensively conducted in South India in order to know; how the second language was learned by them? Because, for South Indians English is the most common second language rather than other Indian languages. The intension of doing this study was to find out the effects of media in the form of movies, TV programmes and reading materials like comics, on linguistic behaviours of children. It was found that the people of South India were traditional and also modern in their way. Parents seemed to be active in providing all sorts of modern accessories to their children, but were against the excessive use of media inputs like watching of TV programmes without their assistance. The children of some families, who had more restrictions upon them, were managed to watch TV programmes and also play video games in their friend's houses. Whereas the children of families having more autonomy seemed to be more close with their parents than the media contents. In some cases it was found that the parents were accompanying as co partners with children while watching movies and also reading comic books. Children also liked to create imaginative play situations among the friend's groups, living in a common grounded belief system taken place around the television sets and matters of extra reading materials. Media had its various effects seen upon both the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of children. Children mostly learned languages like English, Hindi and some foreign languages like Greek, Latin and Chinese, etc from the media exposures.

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