On the Mutual Effect of L1 and L2 in SLA: A Brief Look at Cook's Multi-competence

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Abstract—**Considering the notion of multi-competence coined by Cook (1991) calls on the necessity to revisit the stance of first language in foreign language teaching. The use of mother tongue in second language acquisition (SLA) is widely criticized by many practitioners, notably Krashen (1981). However, more recently Widdowson (2003) also called for an explicitly bilingual approach. The present paper, though arguing for the use of L1 in L2 context, did not ignore the fact that L2 can exert inevitable effects on L1.**

Index Terms—**L2 user, multi-competence, native language**

I. INTRODUCTION

We build ourselves and our sense of ourselves as persons through our verbal and non-verbal actions. In fact, we build up our sense of self as a result of the way that other people respond to us. In a sense, the way we communicate with our environment shapes and forms who we are and who we think we are, not only in abstract or psychological ways but in a very pragmatic and every-day-live fashion. Similarly, learning a new language involves adding a new identity to the existing one. In fact, learning a new language is a metamorphosis; that is, it changes everything about you from your first language to your brain (Cook, 1991, 1992, 2003). Indeed, learning another language does not only give you a skill but it changes you. Besides, your first language might possibly exert inevitable effects on SLA, too. In the following paper, the researchers, compatible with Cook's multi-competence, are delineating the mutual effects of L1 and L2 in SLA.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *multi-competence* was originally defined as "the compound state of a mind with two grammars" (Cook, 1991, p. 112). Elsewhere, Cook (1992) asserts that multi-competence is usually said to be the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind. Through a focus on Cook's concept of multi-competence, one can infer that Cook's multi-competence, therefore, involves the whole mind of the speaker, not simply their first language (L1) or their second language (L2). In fact, Cook's notion of multi-competence conceives knowledge as an integrated whole in the mind. Put another way, it is a holistic interpretation of bilingualism opposed to an atomistic interpretation of bilingualism.

"Holistic multi-competence is seen as an offshoot of polylectal grammar theory applied to monolinguals. [That is,] language teaching should try to produce multi-competent individuals not ersatz native speakers" (Cook, 1992, p. 557). In the field of dialectology, a polylectal grammar, is a linguistic analysis set up to encode or represent a range of related varieties in a way that displays their structural differences. What Cook in 1991 reported was that L1 competence and L2 competence were never treated as a single system. Put differently, Cook's multi-competence entails the integration of the lexicons of two or more languages.

Believing that the mind of an L2 speaker is different from the mind of an L1 speaker, Cook raised a number of questions, including whether the bilingual's languages form two separate systems or only one system. In fact, the idea of multi-competence is a different state of mind from monolingual linguistic competence. On the other hand, the knowledge of the second language is not an imitation knowledge of an L1; it is something that has to be treated on its own terms, alongside the knowledge of a first language. A single mind with more than one language has a totality that is very different from a mind with a single language (De Bot, Lowie, &Verspoor, 2005).

The notion of multi-competence can be investigated from two senses—theoretical and practical (Brown, Malmkjaer & Williams, 1996). Theoretically, "it is independent of the debate over the role of universal grammar in adult SLA. The issue is whether the polyglot's language systems are completely independent" (p. 56). Practically speaking, the notion "advocates a change in philosophy concerning such issues as the 'target' for SLA which cannot by definition be monolingual competence. A further implication, according to Brown et al., is that "if an atmosphere is created in which the first language competence of an individual is recognized and valued then this might potentially have an important affective and motivational impact on their approach to learning a second language"(p. 56).

The relationship between L1 and L2 has been the topic of numerous studies in SLA research. As to Ellis (1994), the linchpin of the debate is limited to "the incorporation of features of the L1 into the knowledge system of the L2 which the learner is trying to build" (p. 28). However, research shows that transfer phenomenon is not unidirectional. In other words, it is not limited to the influence of L1 to L2, but can also entail the effect of L2 on L1. Or what Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) refer to as forward transfer. That is, the influence of L2 on L3 is also plausible.

Regarding the use of L1 in language teaching, there are two approaches: monolingual and bilingual. As a proponent of the monolingual approach, Krashen (1981) holds that learners acquire foreign languages following basically the same path they acquire their mother tongue. Thus, as to him, the use of L1 in the learning process should be minimized. The rationale for the use of L1 in the classroom is that "the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn [since] they will internalize it to begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it'' (Sharma, 2006, p.80). In fact, the use of L1 has long been considered as a lower language and a source of errors. The bilingual approach, in contrast, holds that L1 use is beneficial in EFL context. In practice, the use of mother tongue is seen as a common feature in EFL and its judicious use makes positive contribution to the learning process (Atkinson, 1993; Aurbuch, 1993; Widdowson, 2003). In a sense, it is undeniable to assume, when students come to the classroom they don't come out of the blue; they come "loaded" with their native language and a cultural heritage that nobody must deny or underestimate.

A. On the Plausibility of L1 Use in EFL Context

Whether to use of translation in EFL classes has become a hot debate in L2 learning. Several scholars aired different viewpoints concerning the use of translation. Duff (1990) was among the first to support of translation as a strategy that invites discussion and speculation. As to Duff, language competence is a two-way system by which we need to be able to communicate. In fact, learning a second language is not a monolingual phenomenon, and L2 learners inevitably have an access to their L1 reservoir. Cook (1992), in the same line, holds that L2 learners use their L1 while processing L2. Cook's idea implies that L1 must not be separated from L2, but instead, L1 must be used while the teacher instructs students. Kasmar (1999) contends "the use of bilingual text in the classroom may be a boon or an omen for an ESL teacher" (p. 10). Accordingly, in the study carried out by Calis and Dikilitas (2012), the results indicated that the "use of translation helps them reading comprehension and memorize target vocabulary" (p. 5079). The very study came to hold that translation tasks contribute to learners' receptive and productive skills, as well.

Besides, the use of L1 is highly suggested for conveying the meaning of an unknown word. To several scholars (e.g., Laufer & Shmueli, 1997), L1 translation is the most effective because it is clear, short and familiar. In the same vein, when the use of an L1 translation is combined with the use of word cards, learners will have an effective strategy for speeding up vocabulary growth (Nation, 2001). Nation contends that any criticism regarding translation of the L1-L2 word pairs is unsupportive. In the study done by Lameta-Tufuga (1994), the result indicated that the learners did the task in their first language outperformed the learners who did the task in their second language.

Without a doubt, L2 use in EFL classrooms needs to be maximized where learners have little chance to use the L2 outside the classroom (Nation, 2003). Nation holds that through classroom management one can easily do maximize the use of L2. Classroom management entails telling the class what to do (e.g., take out your book, turn to page 6), controlling behavior (e.g., be quiet), and explaining activities (i.e., get into pairs). However, to Nation, the use of L2 is a source of embarrassment for shy learners and those who think they are not very proficient in the L2. In effect, the use of L1 in the tasks which involve a heavy cognitive load is highly efficient. That is, if a meaning based L2 task is beyond the capacities of the learners, a little use of L1 can have a facilitating role.

Still, care must be taken in the use of translation in EFL classes. Although translation has been given a bad name in modern language teaching, it is only considered dangerous if it is become the only translation technique. Nation (1990) declares that translation can be highly efficient, but should be cautiously employed because it may result false equation between concepts in L1and L2. Moreover, translation might be responsible for interference errors.

Heltai (1989) puts forth that translation can be a useful technique under the following conditions: (1) translation should not be used where it does not belong. It should not be used excessively; (2) a translation exercise should always be thoroughly prepared; and (3) translation should be integrated with other activities. Newmark (1992), also, says in the early stages, translation from L1 to L2 may be useful as a form of control and consolidation of basic grammar and vocabulary. In the middle stages, translation from L2 to L1 may be useful in dealing with the errors. In the advanced stages, translation from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1 is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers.

B. The Effect of L2 on L1

There is a variety of factors that affect L1, too. As to Cook (1991), the question of L2 effects on the L1 arose out of the notion of multi-competence. In fact, multi-competence opens up reverse transfer from the second language to the first and other forms of transfer (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2009). Accordingly, Pavlenko (2000) holds that there are a number of individual, linguistic, and psycholinguistic constraints that determine the nature and extent of L2 influence on L1. More meticulously, the effects of L2 on L1 can be evaluated in at least three ways (Cook, 2003): positive effects on the L1, negative effects on the L1, and effects that are essentially neutral.

To deal with the positive effect of L2 on L1, Cook (2003) declares that the first language can be enhanced by the use of a second language. In much the same way, Cook declares the use of the first language invoked the concept of brain-training. By the same token, the development of learners' intellectual faculties could be achieved. Along the same line, Bialystock (2001) argues that extensive research into bilingual development shows overall that L2 user children have more precocious metalinguistic skills than their monolingual peers (Cook, 2003). Nevertheless, the first language can also be harmed by the use of a second language. Language loss or attrition is among the harmful effects of L2 on L1. Accordingly, there are circumstances under which the prolonged speaking of an L2 can lead to the loss of the L1. In fact, attrition refers to the phenomenon that gaining ability in L2 amounts to losing ability in L1 (Pavlenko, 2003).

Ignoring the mutual relationship between L1 and L2 is as absurd as claiming that the sun rises from the west. To better appreciate the nature of relationship between L1 and L2, it is worth taking a look at the models proposed by Cook (2003) that may symbolize language representation in the brain of a person who uses two or more languages:

Separation Model.

In separation model, no possible connection between L1 and L2 is traced. In other words, L1 and L2 are stored in two separate entities with no possible interaction. By the same token, according to this rather simplistic model, L1 and L2 are stored in two separate entities with no possible connection between them. Proponents of the very model draw support for this view that L1 acquisition and L2 learning are housed in two separate linguistics systems, and none of these systems can be turned into each other. Compatible with the separation model, Wolck's (1988) coordinate bilingualism contends that coordinate bilinguals have two separate systems for storing and processing the two languages. As to Cook (2003), in this model, the discussion is not about the influence of L2 on L1, but about the balance between elements of a single language system.

As a variation of the separation model, *linked model* involves two separate systems in the same mind whose interactional influence is bidirectional. This is perhaps the typical model assumed in much SLA research; development and use of the L2 is affected by the already existing L1 (Odlin, 1989, cited in Cook, 2003).

Integration Model

Integration model implies the unitary existence of a single language system for L1 and L2, which is in extreme opposite end. Some research in areas of vocabulary (Caramazza & Brones, 1980) and phonology (Williams, 1977) supported this language representation theory, as it provided evidence of a single memory store for both the lexicon and the sound system.

Partial Integration Model

Another model raised in this regard is *partial integration model* which implies that clearly no total integration is possible since L2 users can keep the language apart. As a variation of integration model, it claims the existence of a shared area between the L1 and L2 systems. This area is most likely in the form of a common underlying conceptual base (Kecskes & Papp, 2000) related to various aspects of language such as vocabulary, phonology, and syntax.

Integration Continuum Model

The nature of relationship between L1 and L2 systems goes through changes. The continuum does not necessarily imply a direction of movement. It may be that some people start with separation and move towards integration or vice versa, or the languages might stay permanently separate. L1 and L2 systems could start as two separate systems, and then gradually turn into one system, as it is the case in Consecutive Bilingualism. Conversely, they could start as one, and then gradually turn into autonomous systems, as it is the case in Simultaneous Bilingualism. The integration continuum does not necessarily apply to the whole language system (Cook, 2003); a person's lexicon might be integrated, their phonology separate. Nor does it necessarily affect all individuals in the same way; some may be more integrated, some not, a factor of individual variation subsuming Weinreich's types of bilingualism.

C. On the Death of Native Speaker

Revaluing the concept of native speaker, Cook (1999) coined the term multi-competence. In fact, the rationale behind multi-competence raises from the issue whether L2 learners had access to Universal Grammar (UG) was seen as a matter of whether they learnt the same grammars as monolingual native speakers or not.

Many teachers and learners today still prefer a 'native speaker' model. But native speakers are often limited to their own local dialect, may not be aware of international usages; and many English speakers who were originally non-native are today fully competent. (Shakouri & Shakouri, 2014). Non-native fully competent speakers have the advantage of being an appropriate role model; and the language proficiency level of the non-native fully proficient speaker is, by definition, achievable. Cook (2003) asserts by this definition, however, it is impossible for an L2 user to become a native speaker – one reason why so many L2 users think of themselves as 'failures' and so many SLA researchers treat them in the same way: 'learner's language is deficient by definition' (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997). Cook (2003) outlines three arguments against the use of native speakers as the norm against which L2 users should be measured are: (1) the rights of L2 users, (2) the number of L2 users, and (3) the distinctive characteristics of L2 users.

The rights of L2 users

Cook (2003) argues that the L2 user is a person in his own right not an imitation of someone else. A language user not a language learner is not as an approximation to a monolingual native speaker. Thus, one group must not judge other people as failures for not belonging to their group in terms of race, class sex or language. This look which is prescribed by those who felt the sense of ownership of first language is called norm-biased approach (Sifakis & Sougari,

2003). By the same token, a native speaker of English who considers himself as the right owner of the foreign language implies their tendency to uphold a set of rules that map their competence and performance and against which non-native speakers competence and performance will be measured. Thus, whether one L2 user is going to be the consumer of one's L1 is not to be subordinated.

The numbers of L2 users

The widespread use of English around the world is undeniable. In much the same way no one exactly knows how many monolingual native speakers in the world are, and also no one knows the exact number of those who use English as their second language. As to Cook (2003) while the construct of the native speaker competence may be appropriate in first language acquisition as all human beings attain it, the concept of idealized bilingual competence can be extremely misleading since so few L2 users attain it.

Kachru (1985) insists that 'the native speakers [of English] seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization' (p. 30). What makes language global is not the concept of nativity but it is the concept of internationality. As Ur (2009) contends, we have to accept that we are native speakers of our own language. In fact, what English native speakers take pride of is that their language has become an international means of communication, not because they are native to that language. However, as the number of second and foreign language speakers of English far exceeds, the number of the first language speakers of English implies that Standard British language and American English is no longer the privilege of native speakers. Thus, it is a totem to claim a native speaker has an omniscient power and he/she is always considered as a yardstick for measuring a non-native speaker' competence. Along the same line, Rajagopalan (2004) holds considering the native speaker as a consummate speaker of the language was an incredibly impoverished sense. This anti-cognitive perspective towards language acquisition comes out the facts that nativity is not a matter of genetics but training and practice. Thus, educationally, it is not a bold claim that English has no native speakers.

The distinctive characteristics of L2 users

If L2 users are different kinds of people, the interest of SLA research lies in discovering their characteristics, not their deficiencies compared to native speakers. In Cook (2003) the characteristics of L2 users are stated as four propositions: (1) the L2 user has other uses for language than the monolingual; (2) the L2 user's knowledge of the second language is typically not identical to that of a native speaker; (3) the L2 user's knowledge of their first language is in some respects not the same as that of a monolingual; and (4) L2 users have different minds from monolinguals.

III. CONCLUSION

In practicality, the taboo against using L1 in the classroom is breaking down. The above review of the literature on the bilateral effects of L1 and L2 leaves no doubt that such influence is inevitable. The judicious use of L1, from one side, in L2 context can not only maximize language learning but also provide a secure atmosphere that can guarantee the success of language learning. Nevertheless, L1 use can also lead to language attrition in SLA. In this regard, the development of a multi-competence perspective has been useful in suggesting not only new interpretations of existing theories and phenomena but also new research questions to be tackled.

Undeniably, whenever teachers face a problem in their teaching, the first principle is that they should endeavor to solve classroom problems through the application of pedagogical skills rather than through administrative or disciplinary procedures prescribed earlier. It is worth reminding that an English policy in classroom, as to Auerbach (1993), "is rooted in a particular ideological perspective [that] rests on unexamined assumptions and serves to reinforce inequities in the broader social order" (p. 9). Auerbach argues for the reasoned and appropriate use of L1 in L2 context whenever positive effects are resulted, for instance. Thus, "when learners using L1 in classrooms, the teacher should observe this carefully to see what opportunities for learning are occurring" (Nation, 1997, 25).

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