

SECOND LANGUAGE AND BACKGROUND LANGUAGE
INFLUENCES ON THE ORAL PRODUCTION
OF SPANISH WORDS AND PHRASES AS
A THIRD LANGUAGE AMONG
5 - 6 YEAR OLD STUDENTS.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to discover the possible factors that contribute to the oral production of words and phrases among 5-6 year old kindergarten students learning Spanish as third language in an international school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Six subjects were involved in the study with three different mother tongues; namely, of Chinese, Hindi and Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) and English was the medium of instruction in school. The study was conducted over a period of one school year and specifically examined the role of English proficiency (L2) in the production of English-Spanish cognates, the role of mother tongue (L1) and cross-linguistic awareness in the production of Spanish words and phrases. Also examined were the influence of parental support and role of songs on the oral production Spanish words and phrases.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the young subjects and observations of Spanish teaching-learning sessions which were videotaped. Questionnaire were passed on to parents followed by telephone interviews to corroborate information about the home environment of subjects, types and frequency of support. An interview was also conducted with the Spanish teacher to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the behaviours of subjects during class sessions.

The results of the study showed that among the different mother tongues, subjects with Hindi as their mother tongue (L1) produced the most number of Spanish words and phrases which may be attributed to Spanish and Hindi originating from the same language branch. In terms of the English-Spanish cognates that were produced, generally subjects who were proficient in English (L2) produced more cognates compared to subjects who were less proficient (based on WIDA scores) with the exception of one subject. Also, subjects were able to produce more Spanish phrases and words that were introduced using songs. Subjects who demonstrated cross-linguistic awareness, especially in terms of awareness of the similarities between learning

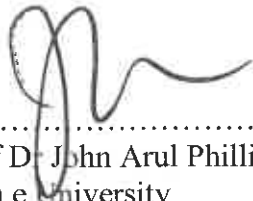
English and Spanish produced more Spanish words and phrases. However, parental support and support outside the class did not influence the production of Spanish words and phrases.

The findings of the study support the Typological Primacy Model, L2 Status Factor, Developmentally Moderated Transfer Hypothesis and Cumulative Enhancement Model to a certain degree.

Exposing children to a third language at such a young age is a valuable endeavor. It is proven that younger students can learn multiple languages at one time when given the opportunity.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised /read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or, exclusion from the award of the degree.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norely Abd Rahman', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Learning and acquiring another language other than one's own mother tongue is being encouraged in many school systems. First language or mother tongue acquisition is an "automatic" expectation when babies begin babbling their first words. According to Cole and Cole (2001), children raised in a normal speaking or signing environment where communication is appropriate to their hearing ability, they will acquire the basic elements of language with no special assistance from adults (Cole & Cole, 2001).

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, criticism was leveled at learning another language. For example, Laurie (1890) in her book titled *Lectures on Language and Linguistic Method in School* argued that culture is best transmitted through language and it has to be through one's mother tongue. Any culture derived from a foreign language will only be of value when it is translated to one's mother tongue. Jespersen (1922) in his book *Nature, Development and Origin* suggested that it is an arduous task for an individual to learn another language and native like fluency is almost impossible.

Saer (1923) compared rural and urban monolingual and bilingual students in Wales and discovered that monolinguals scored higher or at least the same as bilinguals on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test and other tests. He suggested that bilingual activity created confusion in the learner's brain, which was then transferred to writing ability.

However, opinions changed and interest in the acquisition of an additional language began with the publication of an article titled *Observations on the Question of Multilingualism* (translated) in 1937 by Maximilian Braun who is credited with being one of the early scholars focusing on multilingualism (Chaponot, 2007). In 1963, Vildomec published a monograph which dealt with the learning styles of multilingual subjects and later Ringbom (1987) compared monolingual and bilingual (Finnish-Swedish) learners learning English as their third language. His publication is credited with being the first book on third language acquisition (Jessner, 2008).

Since then, research on the learning and acquisition of languages other than one's mother tongue flourished among linguists, psycholinguists, sociolinguists, childhood educator and anthropologists (Gleason & Ratner, 1998).

Today, it is common for an individual to be able to converse in languages other than their own mother tongue. The United States Census Bureau (2000) states that the number of Americans who speak another language other than English has increased from 23 million in 1990 to almost 55 million in 2006 and is it increasing annually. The introduction of dual-language programmes (DLP) in several states in the United States has seen increasing number of monolingual English speaking students learn Spanish especially in the states of California, Arizona and Texas. The latest United States Census Bureau (2015) declares that before 2009, there were 30 languages spoken in the U.S. but between 2009 to 2013, there has been an increase of 350 languages.

With globalization and the world becoming "smaller" and countries becoming increasingly interdependent, has led to a boom in being fluent in languages other than one's mother tongue. Interest in learning another language could also be due to "the fact that those people who speak more languages are more appealing to hold high

positions in the labour market” (Solis, 2015, p.2). Also, migration and inter-racial or inter-ethnic marriages has prompted the need for the next generation to be bilingual.

For example, one of the objectives of the European Union (EU) language policy is to ensure that its people in the bloc master two different languages other than their own mother tongue. Language is viewed as an integral part of intercultural understanding as well as enabling mobility among its population. In addition, the European Union (EU) has made it compulsory for all member states to respect language diversity and prohibits any form of language discrimination. Programmes to support language learning have been instituted within the educational framework and vocational training of member nations. This has led to a surge in efforts to revitalize minority languages facing extinction (Gorter & Cenoz, 2011). For instance, Basque is being taught along Spanish and English in the Basque Country to enhance speaking competence in the language, which is slowly being lost. Similarly, Frisian is being taught together with English and Dutch in Friesland, in the northern part of the Netherlands.

England’s Department of Education outlined clearly in their National Curriculum for England Key Stages 1 & 2 Framework that one of these foreign languages should be taught in schools, that is, French, German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish, Latin or Greek. In Denmark, students learn Danish and English and with migration, students with other languages such as Turkish, Albanian and Arabic have proficiency in at least three languages. On the other hand, in Greenland, the languages taught in schools are Greenlandic, Danish and English (Spellerberg, 2011).

Increasingly, countries with one dominant language are adding the learning of other languages to their question bank. China, Japan and South Korea are examples of countries that offer English as a foreign language to students in public schools

beginning in grade one (Fallon & Rublik, 2012). In India, English enjoys the status of an associate official language with Hindi, but students learn their mother tongue in schools depending on the province (Hussain, 2012). In Algeria, Arabic is the medium of instruction in school, but students learn French and English to improve their chances in the job market (Benstead & Reif, 2013).

1.2 Terminology Issues

As with new areas of research, terminologies surrounding research on the learning and acquisition of a third language happens to be not well defined. The following section is an attempt to clarify several terminologies in the field to better understand the context of this study.

Monolingual is the condition in which a person speaks and understands only one language. For example, a larger proportion of Americans are monolingual with English as their mother tongue. *Mother tongue* is a child's first language learned from older family members at home, which is related to home language defined as language learned at home. However, the definition of mother tongue can vary. Canada is a case in point, where the country has changed the definition of mother tongue three times. In 1941, the definition of mother tongue was "the language first learned and still spoken." In 1976, it was changed to "language first spoken and still understood". Then it was changed again in 1981 to "language first learned and still understood" (Edwards, 2012).

Then there is also *indigenous language*, where it is spoken by an indigenous group or community, which is different from the local language. *National language* differs from *international language*, where is unique to a specific nation, which is also called the *official language* of a nation. There is also *minority language*, which

is a language that is spoken by a politically marginalized or numerically smaller population.

Bilingualism means being to speak and write in two languages. Some researchers (Macleod, Fabiano-Smith, Boegner-Pagé, & Fontolliet, 2013) define a bilingual speaker as, “An individual who can speak and understand two languages, whether the speaker’s languages were learned during childhood or later in life.” (p.132). However, bilingualism can vary from full fluency in both languages (Bloomfield, 1933) to an individual who uses both languages to some extent depending on the needs in their everyday interactions (Grosjean, 1989). Thus, bilingualism involves two languages where proficiency can fall between the two ends of the fluency spectrum. In terms of learning the two languages, Patterson (2002) uses the term *simultaneous bilinguals* to mean that both languages are learned at the same time while Kohnert (2010) defines simultaneous bilinguals as acquiring both the languages during infancy and *sequential bilinguals* receive exposure after infancy.

Multilingualism refers to people who are able to speak and write in more than two languages. Also used is the term *trilingualism*, which refers to a person who understands and speaks three languages (Hodal, 2005). It gets confusing when *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (Matthews, 1997) that describes bilingual communities as having two or more different languages. In other words, bilingualism and multilingualism is taken to be synonymous despite the prefix *bi* denoting two and the prefix *multi* denoting more than one. Bhatia and Ritchie (2013) proposed the term *plurilingualism* to refer to both bilingualism and multilingualism, which refers to knowledge and use of two languages and the knowledge and use of three or more languages. Referring to Europe, Jessner (2008) suggested the use of *prulilingualism* to define individuals with more than one language capability in the

continent and multilingualism be used to define a society of many languages. Some researchers (O'Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo, 2014) defined individuals with multiple language capacities as “new speakers” to denote a new era of communication. Therefore, the definition of bilingualism and multilingualism has not been resolved.

1.3 Third Language Learning

In this study, the term learning and acquisition are used synonymously “when applied in a general sense, because nowadays most researchers have become familiar with the continuum use of the two terms covering all sort of learning from implicit intake to explicit learning” (Jessner, 2008. p.18).

There is a controversy on the acquisition of a third language. One group of scholars (Singh & Carroll, 1979; Mitchell & Myles, 1998) argues that there is no difference in the acquisition of a second language (L1) or a third language (L3) as they are learned after the mother tongue. On the other hand, researchers such Hufeisen and Marx (2004) and De Angelis (2007) argue that the acquisition of a third language should not be equated with the acquisition of a second language because the difference is not only quantitative but also qualitative. Also, treating them as similar may lead to the omission of important aspects of third language acquisition (TLA).

The inter-relatedness of bilingualism and third language learning, prompted Cenoz (2000) to identify four possible scenarios of how someone can acquire three languages:

1. An individual acquires three languages simultaneously from the birth.
2. An individual acquires two languages and acquires a third language subsequently.
3. An individual acquires mother tongue (L1) followed by a second language (L2) and then a third language (L3) consecutively.

4. An individual acquires mother tongue (L1) and then acquires two languages simultaneously.

Cenoz (2000) states that when a person who has previously learned two languages (mother tongue and a second language) either simultaneously or consecutively and learns another language that is not native to him or her is defined as third language acquisition (TLA). Alternatively, De Angelis (2007) proposes that third language acquisition should refer to the learning of all languages beyond the second language without giving preference to any particular language. In this study, Hammarberg's (2010) definition is adopted to define the third language;

In dealing with the linguistic situation of a multilingual, the term third language (L3) refers to a non-native language which is currently being used or acquired in a situation where the person already has knowledge of one or more L2s in addition to one or more L1s (p. 97).

1.4 Third Language Learning in Malaysian Public Schools

The Malaysian education system is unique in that several languages are used as the medium instruction in national or public primary schools. Malaysia is a multiracial country, with three major ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia and a few different ethnicities in East Malaysia. In the primary school, there are three types of schools using three different languages as the medium of instruction. In the National Primary School, the Malay language (National Language or Bahasa Malaysia) is the medium of instruction and English is a second language, which is compulsory for all students. In the National Type Chinese Primary School, Mandarin (or Chinese) is the medium of instruction while Bahasa Malaysia and English are taught as separate subjects and compulsory for all students in these schools. In the National Type Tamil Primary School, Tamil is the medium of instruction while Bahasa Malaysia and

English are taught as separate subjects and compulsory for all students in these schools.

At the policy level, English is a required second language for all schools but for many students it is a third language. For a student whose mother tongue is Chinese (L1), learns Bahasa Malaysia (L2) which is a second language and learns English (L3) as a third language. Similarly, a student whose mother tongue is Iban (L1) learns Bahasa Malaysia (L2) which is his or her second language and English becomes the third language (L3).

However, in secondary school, the medium of instruction is only the Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) and English is a compulsory second language (L2) for all students. A student whose mother tongue is Tamil (L1) learns Bahasa Malaysia (L2) as a second language and English (L2) as a third language. So it may be concluded that many students in Malaysian public schools are learning a third language. Another feature of language learning in Malaysian public schools is the learning of a foreign language (L3) which include Arabic, French, German, Japanese and Mandarin (Curriculum Development Centre, 2006). But this practice is confined to students in selected residential schools located in different parts of Malaysia.

The Second Minister of Education, Datuk Idris Jusoh stated that “Malaysians were not accustomed to learning a new language which was why it was considered odd. In Western countries, learning a new language is so natural, even if it is not native to them. Here it is not part of the culture which is why most people find it difficult to pick up a different language”. He added that “incentives were provided for students to learn a third language namely Arabic, Mandarin and Tamil as an elective subject in schools” (The Star Online, 1 December, 2014).

1.5 Third Language Learning in International Schools in Malaysia

This study was conducted at the International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL). Before narrowing into Malaysia, in the Southeast Asian region, there are other international schools that are within the International School of Kuala Lumpur's league. Comparing ISKL and the IASAS¹ schools, 4 out of 6 of the schools (67%) also offer at least one foreign language to their kindergarten students (Appendix A). These foreign languages could be a third language for some students in these schools.

International School of Kuala Lumpur was the first fully accredited international school to be established in Malaysia in 1965 based on the American curriculum providing education for children of American expatriates working in the country. Since then, the establishment of international schools has expanded rapidly and in 2012, there were a total of 43 schools (see Appendix B for the list of schools). Nineteen out of thirty-nine (48.7%) international schools (primary only) offer at least one foreign language to their students in the kindergarten age (Appendix C). These schools are not required to adopt the Malaysian national curriculum but instead may offer a variety of international curriculum. For example, some schools adopt the curriculum of the United Kingdom, focusing on the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Others adopt the American, Australian, Indian, French or Arabic curriculum. These schools are accredited by their respective accreditation bodies such as the British Overseas School, Western Australian Association of Schools and Council of International Schools.

The students in international schools are very diverse originating from different countries with different mother tongues. About 48% of the International School offers at least one foreign language such as Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese,

¹ IASAS stands for Interscholastic Association of Southeast Asian Schools which ISKL benchmarked as "like school" or schools that have similar population base and diversity, i.e., school in the same league.

Spanish and other to their students in the early years from aged 4 – 6 (see Appendix B). For example, a German student who attends Alice Smith International School which offers the British curriculum, speaks German (L1), learns various subjects in English (L2) and opts to learn an additional language such as Bahasa Malaysia (L3) offered by the school (see appendix B).

Initially, these international schools were only allowed to accept international students. However, of late Malaysian students were permitted to enter international schools. So a Malaysian Chinese student whose mother tongue is Mandarin (L1) is accepted into an international school where the medium of instruction is English (L2) may take up learning Spanish (L3) as a third language.

1.6 Problem Statement

Apparently learning a third language is gaining popularity among both international and Malaysian students. Hence, it is imperative to engage in understanding the factors contributing to learning a third language. Among the issues that is of concern is whether the attributes of any particular language contributes or hinders the learning of a third language and the extent to which the strategies in second language learning may be applied to third language learning.

De Angelis (2007) argues that people are capable of learning and speaking two (bilingual) languages and also more than two languages (multilingual) and this has prompted researchers to investigate how they are acquired. Research on the learning of a second language (especially English) has been prolific but research on the learning of a third language is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Jessner (2008) proposes that there is a connection between learning a first language or mother tongue (L1) and learning a second language. This must be carefully looked at when studying how individuals learn a third language (L3). She