FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING (FAKTOR KESUKSESAN DAN KEGAGALAN DALAM PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA KEDUA)

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Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti dan menguraikan faktor yang mempunyai kontribusi terhadap kesuksesan dan kegagalan penutur bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua dalam mengusai bahasa ini di tiga aspek bahasa: kelancaran, struktur bahasa dan pengucapan. Data untuk kajian ini diperoleh dengan melaksanakan wawancara semi terstruktur terhadap dua mahasiswa di universitas Victoria di Wellington, New Zealand. Analisa data secara kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa faktor seperti pembelajaran bahasa kedua pada periode prapuber, berada di lingkungan bahasa kedua, ekspos terhadap bahasa kedua, kemampuan berakulturasi, motivasi dan strategi pembelajaran berdampak terhadap penguasaan bahasa di tiga area tersebut di atas. Analisa data juga menunjukkan bahwa keberadaan dan ketidakberadaan faktor tersebut dalam periode pembelajaran bahasa kedua berpengaruh secara signifikan terhadap penguasaan bahasa di tiga area tersebut.

1. Introduction

Literature in second language acquisition (SLA) proposes the significance of factors such as age, the congruence of first and second language (L1 and L2), environment, exposure to the target language, cognition and motivation in L2 attainment (Ortega, 2009, Cook, 2008 & Rogerson-Revell, 2011). The salient contribution of each factor is different among learners because each learner acquires L2 through different learning experiences (Cook, 2008). Contrarily, the absence of some factors in learners' learning experience may also prevent L2

attainment in aspects of a language. Therefore, this study investigates and outlines factors that contribute to success and failure of two language learners of English (L2) in three areas of language: fluency, grammar and pronunciation.

To collect the data for this study, semi–structured interviews were carried out with two students of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique in which the selection was based on the availability of the participants for the study (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Both of the participants,

Fatimah and Nadia (pseudonyms), started to learn English at the age of eleven years old in two different learning environments. Fatimah who was an immigrant from Iraq learned English in an English speaking country, Wellington. In contrast, Nadia learned the language in her home country, Indonesia, where English is used as a foreign language. Furthermore, as the researcher and one of the participants did not speak the same L1, the interviews were conducted in English, the participants' L2. The use of L2 was also intended to allow the researcher to obtain samples of the participants' oral production to analyse their L2 attainment levels in the three areas. The results of this analysis were used to crosscheck the relevance of the factors mentioned in the interview to their L2 attainment.

2. Factors of Success and Failure in Second Language Learning

The data analysis was carried out in two phases. The first phase was the analysis of the recording to determine the participants' levels of attainment in three aspects: fluency, grammar and pronunciation. Fluency was defined as the capacity to fill time with talk (Nation & Newton, 2009). According to Nation and Newton (2009), fluent speakers of L2 can express herself in the language in such a way that they do not stop many times to think. The fluency levels were rated according to 'not fluent', 'fluent' and 'very fluent' scales. Furthermore, the participants' levels of attainment of

grammar and pronunciation were defined in five scales: 'not accurate', 'less accurate', 'quite accurate', almost accurate' and 'accurate'. The accurate attainment of grammar was defined when the participant made no grammar errors in her use of the tenses. In the area of pronunciation, it was determined by the participants' ability to produce the English quality sounds and intonation. In these two areas, the number of errors that the participant made impacted his/her level of attainment. Moreover, in the second phase of the data analysis, the data was transcribed and coded to categorize factors of success and failures in their second language learning.

The data analysis of the participants' speech in L2 (as seen in table 1) shows that both Fatimah and Nadia achieved slightly similar levels of attainment in the area of fluency. Fatimah demonstrated 'very fluent' attainment in which she could express her ideas clearly without having hesitations, pauses, false starts and repeated words, a set of factors to indicate fluency in speech (Wood, 2001). Comparatively, Nadia showed 'fluent attainment' in her L2 speech. She was still able to convey her ideas fluently but she made a few pauses between her utterances. In contrast, the two participants demonstrated significant differences in their levels of attainment in the areas of grammar and pronunciation. In the area of grammar, Fatimah achieved 'accurate' attainment. She could keep the accuracy of her use of grammar in her

speech. Conversely, Nadia just achieved 'less accurate attainment'. She kept transferring her first language 'no-verb tense' into the English 'verb–tense' systems. In the area of pronunciation, Fatimah also obtained the highest attainment (accurate attainment). She could overcome all pronunciation difficulties commonly made by the native speakers of Arabic, her first language, such as the substitutions of the sounds /p/ with /b/, /v/ with /f/ or /ɪ/ with /e/ (Swan & Smith, 2001). She could also maintain the quality of all English sounds and accents. Contrarily, Nadia only demonstrated 'quite accurate' level of attainment in L2. Though her English is intelligible, she could not maintain the quality of the English sounds and accent. She, for example, kept pronouncing /feri/ instead of /veri/ for the word 'very'. She also could not produce the sounds /p/, /t/ and /k/ with aspiration and differentiate between long and short vowels.

Table 1

Name of Participants	Age	Age of Onset	Level of Attainment in L2 (English)			Learning model	Factors of Success	Factors of Failure
			Fluency	Grammar	Pronunciation			
Fatimah	**23**	11	Very fluent	accurate	accurate	The mixture of natural and instructed learning approach	- Early age of onset - Motivation - Environment - Intense exposure to L2 - The ability to acculturate	
Nadia	34	11	Fluent	Less accurate	Quite accurate	The mixture of natural and instructed learning approach	- Motivation - Learning strategies	- Lack of exposure to the target language at an early age

The distinctions between Fatimah and Nadia's level of attainment in the three areas investigated: fluency, grammar and pronunciation, correspond to the factors of success and failure that they revealed in the interview. Fatimah stated that although she experienced instructed learning approaches, her success was generated by the presence of six interrelated factors: age, motivation, environment, the ability to acculturate and intense exposure to the L2. The occurrence of these factors was facilitated by her immigration to New Zealand, the L2 country, at the age of 11. She claimed that living in the L2 environment and her friendly nature in which she could acculturate easily allowed her to learn the language through real-life interaction with a great number of local people. From this interaction she received exposure to the L2 and opportunities to practise. Literature in relevant fields also states that living in L2 environment promotes L2 acquisition because it allows learners to be actively involved in real-life interaction where they can obtain intense exposure to input along with opportunities for output, two important components for SLA (Ortega, 2009; Ellis, 2009). Input is a source of linguistic data that learners can process for meaning and use for hypotheses formation (Krashen, 1985 cited in Ortega). Such hypotheses relate to what is possible in a language (Krashen, 1985 cited in Ortega). On the other hand, producing output helps learners notice gaps between what they want to say and can say as well as to test hypotheses that they have formed from input comprehension (Swain 1985 cited in Elllis & He, 1999). Another importance of output is stated by Nation and Newton (2009). He claims that by being involved in real-life interaction, learners can produce much output which leads to improvement in their fluency. This explains why Fatimah achieved the highest attainment in the area of fluency.

Fatimah also stated that an early age of learning the L2 was the factor which helped accelerate her acquisition and facilitated the formation of native like pronunciation (as seen in the table 1). Unlike her mother, who still struggled with the L2 until the interview time, Fatimah could speak fluently in the New Zealand English accent within a few months. Fatimah's claim on the importance of the age factor to SLA is supported by Lenneberg (1967 cited in Rogerson-Revel 2011) who argues that ultimate attainment in L2 can only be achieved if learners start learning before puberty. Learning L2 at an early age through the naturalistic approach facilitated the formation of implicit grammatical knowledge (Ellis, 2009) and native-like pronunciation (Rogerson-Revell, 2011). The implicit knowledge which is intuitive and automatic (Scheffler & Cinciata, 2010) is the rationale why Fatimah could maintain the accuracy of her grammar use in the interview. Furthermore, Fatimah stated that her motivation was a factor that pushed her to learn the language harder. She said that since the first day of schooling, she had

realized that the possession of L2 was the key factor to being accepted by friends and to being fully involved in school activities. The importance of motivation in L2 acquisition is also claimed by Cook (2008) who states that a learner with motivation will find learning L2 much easier and will achieve higher attainment.

Nadia, on the other hand, stressed a different combination of factors which contributed to her L2 attainment. She claimed that her attainment was mostly facilitated by two factors: motivation and learning strategies. The contribution of the latter factor, learning strategies, to SLA does not seem to appear frequently in the literature. However, Cohen and Macaro (2007) as well as Oxford (1990 cited in Zhang, 2012) do state that learning strategies help learners solve problems in learning and accelerate the progress of acquisition. Nadia stated that her motivation of being able to master the L2 was the factor which triggered her to find effective strategies to compensate for the shortcomings of the instructed learning which dominated her initial L2 acquisition. The instructed learning model that she experienced did not allow her to obtain sufficient exposure to the L2 input and opportunities for output because the L2 was merely used as a tool for task completion. Moreover, in Indonesia, her home country, English (the L2) was rarely used for daily communication. According to Nadia, there were two strategies that she utilised to promote her attainment: reading books in the L2 and having close

friendship with a native speaker of the L2 from 18 years of age. She claimed that reading books helped her to acquire new vocabulary. This claim is supported by Nation (2009) who states that meaning-focused reading activities facilitate intake in vocabulary. Moreover, Nadia stated that having good rapport with a native speaker of the L2 helped her improve her fluency because this provided her with exposure to input and opportunities for output. Furthermore, according to Nadia, this good rapport also made her feel more confident to practise talking in the L2. Ortega (2009) also reveals the importance of communicative confidence to L2 attainment. He claims that the possession of communicative confidence promotes the willingness to communicate in L2. Having frequent opportunities to communicate in L2 facilitates the development of L2 fluency (Ortega, 2009).

However, as seen in table 1, the strategies that Nadia employed just impacted on her fluency attainment but failed to promote her attainment in the area of grammar and pronunciation. The absence of opportunities for L2 input and output at an early age prevented Nadia from forming implicit grammatical knowledge and quality L2 pronunciation. Nadia also reveals in the interview that she had problems with grammar especially in oral production. She also stated that she could not pronounce the sound /v/ in the automatic production as well as differentiate between long and short

vowels. Acquiring L2 through an instructed learning model just facilitated the formation of explicit knowledge which is commonly accessible through controlled processing (Ellis, 2009). Moreover, the ability to achieve ultimate attainment in the area of pronunciation is impaired after puberty (Lennerberg, 1967 cited in Rogerson-Revell, 2011) and grammar (Ellis, 2008).

3. Conclusion

This study which investigated factors which contribute to success and failure of L2 learners' attainment in three areas of language: fluency, grammar, and pronunciation results in two findings. First, the existence of factors such as pre-puberty learning, L2 environment, exposure to L2, the ability to acculturate, motivation and learning strategies leads to attainment in the three areas of language. However, as the participants experience different learning approaches, the presence and the absence of these factors in their learning experience significantly impact the levels of attainment in each area. Moreover, it is interesting that the second participant of this study stressed out the importance of learning strategies to her attainment. Since there is not much research which investigates the contribution of learning strategies to SLA, this finding emphasizes the need to conduct further research in this area.

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