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Araştırma Makalesi

THE ROLE OF BILINGUALISM IN ACQUIRING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The present study emphasizes the role of bilingualism in foreign language learning by investigating the acquisition of English as a third language of Turkish bilingual university students with Arabian origins. This study is based on a phenomenologic research design which is a qualitative research methodology, within the interpretive research paradigm, that inquires the qualitatively diverse ways in which people experience something. The data of the study were gathered through a semi-structured interview developed by the researcher and content analysis technique was utilized to analyze the collected data. The results of the study suggest that being already proficient in both Turkish and Arabic languages facilitates the acquisition of a third language and the already possessed languages provide an advantage in acquiring a new language.

Keywords: Acquisition, foreign language acquisition, bilingualism, English as a 3rd language.

YABANCI DİL EDİNİMİNDE ÇİFT DİLLİLİĞİN ROLÜ

Öz

Bu çalışma, iki dilli olan Arap kökenli Türk üniversite öğrencilerinin üçüncü dil olarak İngilizce edinimini araştırarak iki dilliliğin yabancı dil edinimindeki rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Farklı bakış açıları irdeleyerek olgu, olay ve kavramlara yeni bakış açıları getiren yorumlamaya dayalı yaklaşım modellerinden fenomenolojik araştırma desenine dayalı bu çalışma niteliksel bağlamda katılımcıların olayla ilgili tecrübelerini incelemektedir. Araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat soruları aracılığıyla çalışmanın verileri toplanıp içerik analizi tekniği kullanılarak veriler analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma sonunda elde edilen bulgular Arapça ve Türkçe dillerinde yetkin olmanın yeni bir yabancı dil edinimini kolaylaştırdığını ve sahip olunan dillerin sıfırdan edinilen dilin ediniminde avantaj olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dil edinimi, yabancı dil edinimi, çift dillilik, üçüncü dil olarak İngilizce.

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Introduction

Whether a second language assists a learner to learn other languages or not has been great concern in the related literature. This effect may emerge solely under particular circumstances in which the attitudes towards L2 acquisition influence the learning of the next nonnative language. Further, the effect may contain specific areas of acquisition and not others—for instance, lexical but not syntactic acquisition (Alonso, et al., 2017; Klein, 1995). Additive bilingualism— proficiency in the two languages in a balanced manner (Googoonani & Simin, 2018; Lambert, 1979; Üredi & Ulum, 2016) has been declared to promote a third language learning since those who know a second language have been noted to be better third language learners. Besides, bilingual education appears to be paving the way to additive bilingualism. Thomas (1988) discovered that those who were biliterate formed more expertise in a third language than students with monolingual literacy— knowing or able to use only one language. Further, Bild and Swain (1989), besides Rothman, Alonso, and Puig-Mayenco (2019), suggested that competence in two languages positively affected third language acquisition. Swain, Lapkin, Rowen, and Hart (1990) clarified that kids who could read and write in their mother tongue attained higher grades in their third language French, compared to those who could not read or write in their mother tongue. Additionally, a number of studies in the related field propose that having literacy in two languages promotes meta-linguistic awareness. Juveniles who are subject to two languages are prone to form awareness towards use of language and thus, they may rapidly crack the codes of a third language (Bartolotti & Marian, 2017; Klein, 1995). Studies on third language learning have been extensively conducted in recent decades (Abu-Rabia & Sanitsky, 2010; Grey, Williams, & Rebuschat, 2014; Molnár, 2010; Slabakova, 2017). An analytical relation of this is the awareness of the reality that people are possibly and naturally multilingual, that multilingualism is the natural case of language competency, and that this develops suggestions for a proper theory of language ability, utilization and learning. The difference between second and third language learning indicates that language learners are being cut off based on the intricacy of their language knowledge (Hammarberg, 2009). Acquisition of a third language was previously included in the field of second language acquisition. Many researchers have recently and earnestly begun to look at the incident of third language acquisition or multilingualism as an individual area of query (Leung, 2007). The expansion of English in Europe— as the most dominant language of broader communication has highly fostered social and individual bilingualism, as well as multilingualism. In a similar vein, such drastic changes within the linguistic domain have been encountered in Spain where trilingualism is a common situation (Köksal & Ulum, 2016; Mesaros, 2009). Therefore, this paper focuses on the conceptions of EFL bilingual students on the effects of bilingualism in acquiring English as a 3rd language. This study inquired the stated incident since bilinguals are more experienced language learners and have probably formed learning strategies to a larger scope compared to monolinguals. Moreover, their linguistic (Ünveren, 2019) and intercultural (Er & Bozkırlı, 2019) repertoires are larger.

Methodology

This study aims at finding out the conceptions of EFL students on the effects of their bilingual background in acquiring English as a 3rd language. In order to probe the incident, the study utilized phenomenology— a scientific approach to refer to an explicitly third-person. Likewise, it is an approach to portray related consciousness or experiences through scientific

principles with an anthropological bent. Further, this approach associates the third-person's self-reports with any available evidence to understand their cognitive states. In brief, this approach aims at qualitatively interpreting how the subject perceives the world around.

According to the decisions taken by the relevant boards of Tübitak Ulakbim Tr Dizin, the approval of the ethics committee will be requested from the authors of the articles that will be submitted for publication in all journals that are indexed in Tr Dizin for 2020. However, the present paper was conducted in 2019.

Participants

The required data were gathered from 3 EFL students studying in the English preparatory class of a state university in Turkey. The mother tongue of each participant is Arabic. Further, they all speak both Arabic and Turkish proficiently since they are additive bilinguals. They are all Turkish citizens with Arabic origins. Each of the participants is female.

Instruments

In order to form the semi-structured interview questions, the related literature was firstly scanned. Further, the already developed scales were examined. Having listed a number of items, the most proper ones were selected and the interview questions were developed accordingly. In a similar vein, the data of the study were gathered through semi-structured interview questions formed by the researcher. Inter-coder reliability was conducted for the semi-structured interview questions. For the coding reliability of the interview, Kappa Coefficient for Inter-coder Reliability was calculated and it was found that the coding process was highly reliable ($K = .870$, $p < .001$). Convenience sampling method was utilized in the study (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, and Nigam, 2013).

Findings and Results

This section clarifies the parts of interview successively as the effects of bilingualism on EFL learning, the effects of bilingualism on learning EFL structures, the effects of bilingualism on learning EFL vocabulary, the advantage of the first or second language, strategies used while learning EFL, and difficulties in EFL learning, comparison of the first and second language with the third language. Table 1 displays the themes related to the conceptions of the informants on the effects of bilingualism on EFL learning.

Table 1: The Effects of Bilingualism on EFL Learning

Theme	f	Remarks
Advantageous	3	<i>I think being a bilingual is advantageous in learning English. Arabic is a difficult and complex language and one whose mother tongue is Arabic can easily learn English.</i>
		<i>My mother tongue is Arabic and while learning English, I make comparisons between Arabic and English in my mind. I always think of the Arabic equivalents of English words.</i>
		<i>Being literate both in Arabic and Turkish, I can learn English more easily. I try to analyze English structures and words by using my Arabic background.</i>

It is clear from Table 1 that the informants find bilingualism beneficial when learning a third language. Likewise, three informants mention the positive effects of bilingualism on learning the third language.

Table 2: The Effects of Bilingualism on Learning EFL Structures

Theme	f	Remarks
Structural relations	3	<i>I try to develop structural relations among English, Turkish, and Arabic and this helps me to synthesize the English structures.</i> <i>Comparing Arabic and English structures helps me understand English more.</i> <i>It is beneficial to analyze three languages but sometimes I find it confusing.</i>

The informants declare the structural relations between different languages. In a similar vein, three respondents put forward that they make structural relations while studying English.

Table 3: The Effects of Bilingualism on Learning EFL Vocabulary

Theme	f	Remarks
Equivalents	3	<i>I frequently think of the Arabic equivalents of English words while trying to memorize them.</i> <i>Although the words in different languages occasionally tangle with each other, it is useful to relate them with each other.</i> <i>It is beneficial to compare the words in each language.</i>

As Table 3 clearly represents, the informants use Arabic or Turkish equivalents of English words. Similarly, three respondents compare the equivalents in three languages.

Table 4: The Advantage of the First or Second Language

Theme	f	Remarks
Turkish	2	<i>Turkish is more advantages because Arabic is complex and it is read back to front.</i>
Arabic	1	<i>Arabic is more advantageous and it is closer to English with its structure.</i>

Table 4 simply illustrates that all the informants declare the advantage of being bilingual on the third language acquisition. Further, while two respondents state the advantage of Turkish language on learning English, one expresses the advantage of Arabic on learning English language.

Table 5: Strategies Used while Learning EFL

Theme	f	Remarks
Listening to music	2	<i>I listen to English songs.</i>
Watching movies	2	<i>I frequently watch English movies and try to analyze it.</i>
Using a dictionary	1	<i>I have bought an English dictionary for unknown words. I do online activities and listen to English songs.</i>
Online activities	1	<i>I do online activities when I find internet access.</i>
Making daily revisions	1	<i>I revise the topics every day.</i>
Getting support from others	1	<i>I often ask for help from my peers and teachers.</i>

As Table 5 explains, there are a number of practices mentioned by the informants. While two respondents, for each, expressed listening to music and watching movies, one participant, for each, uttered such practices as *Using a dictionary*, *Online activities*, *Making daily revisions*, and *Getting support from others*.

Table 6: Difficulties in EFL Learning

Theme	f	Remarks
Writing difficulty	1	<i>It is easy to write in English compared to writing.</i>
Reading difficulty	1	<i>I have reading comprehension problems.</i>
Assessment problems	1	<i>I believe I have learnt English well, but I am not able to transfer my knowledge into exams.</i>
Sentence formation	1	<i>I am not able to complete long sentences.</i>

We understand from Table 6 that there are a number of difficulties suggested by the informants. The informants declared problems in writing, reading, knowledge transfer in exams, sentence formation.

Table 7: Comparison of the First and Second Language with the Third Language

Theme	f	Remarks
Similarities and Diversities	3	<p><i>Three of them are difficult when writing, but easy when speaking.</i></p> <p><i>The alphabet of Arabic is different from Turkish and English. So, Arabic may seem hard.</i></p> <p><i>I always asked myself 'How could I say it in Arabic?' I often made comparisons between Arabic and English. Arabic is more complex but it helps to learn English.</i></p>

All the informants declared similarities and diversities between languages. In other words, three respondents compare and contrast English, Turkish, and Arabic and declare both differences and similarities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Bilingualism and multilingualism are currently more commonly utilized terms than they were in the past (Baumgart & Billick, 2018; Harris & McGhee-Nelson, 1992). The related literature on diverse psycholinguist dimensions of bilingualism focuses mainly on two areas. The initial one is composed of case-studies of juveniles whose families consciously try to attain bilingualism in their kids. Sometimes, the conductors of such studies are the parents themselves. Every stated case is exclusive, with diverse situations and characteristics contributing to the proficient, or less proficient, concurrent acquisition of two languages. Though we observe similarities, and compromise in the premises made (e.g. a steady devotion by families to the 'one person one language' assumption when talking to the child seems to devote to the brilliant formation of bilingualism), still there has been little progress of typical themes (Slavkov, 2017; Hoffmann, 1985). Research on learning a third language in a bilingual environment has suggested that literacy in two languages promotes the acquisition of a third one (Edele, Kempert, & Schotte, 2018; Swain, Lapkin, Rowen, & Hart, 1990), just like our study in which the informants suggested the same. The study conducted by Sanz, (2000) compared the acquisition of English as a third language by Catalan bilingual high school students with the acquisition of English by Spanish monolinguals. It was found out that bilingualism has an actual positive impact on the acquisition of a third language. Further, in the study, the evidence was discussed from a cognitive perspective. In our study, the perspectives of the informants also suggested the same result. Similar to our study, previous research also suggested that self-reported language perceptions may be the indicative of linguistic ability (Leivada, Kambanaros, Taxitari, & Grohmann, 2017; Ross, 1998; Shameem, 1998). The already existing self-assessment instruments for inquiring bilinguals cover both domain-general (Branzi, Calabria, Boscarino, & Costa, 2016; Guerrero, Goggin, & Ellis, 1999) and domain-specific competency (Jia, Aaronson, & Wu, 2002). For example, in a study of the relation between self-reported competency and language achievement, Delgado et al. (1999) evaluated Spanish–English bilinguals and associated the self-assessed competency in English and Spanish with the efficiency on the Woodcock–Muñoz Language Survey (Woodcock & Muñoz-Sandoval, 1993). Besides, Delgado et al. (1999) discovered that informants tested their first-language skills more precisely than they their second-language skills. Woodcock–Muñoz scores related each self-reported data of the first language competency with solely the self-reported data of the second language reading and writing (not with the second language speaking and comprehension). In a

similar vein, Bahrick, et al. (1994) explored that language dominance ratings associated highly with attainment in some tasks (e.g., vocabulary recognition) but associated less with achievement in other tasks (e.g., speaking skills). In our study, the informants declared correlations between bilingualism and third language acquisition in that they conceive it advantageous to be bilinguals when acquiring a third language. Further, that the respondents mostly listen to English songs and watch movies in English may be the reason of finding speaking English easy compared to writing in English.

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