UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

VOCABULARY ATTRITION AMONG ADULT ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PERSIAN LEARNERS

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By

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Thesis Submitted to School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

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In The Name Of Allah

To My Lovely Mother & Compassionate Father

For Their Concern

In

My Educational Success

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

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Chairman: Ghazali Bin Mustapha, PhD

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This study aims to investigate the attrition rate of EFL vocabulary among Iranian female and male English language learners. They are students of a University and majored in different fields (between 20 and 25 years old). This study investigated the differences between EFL attrition rate of concrete and abstract nouns, as well as the production and reception of nouns in contextualized and non-contextualized among continuing and non-continuing students across different proficiency levels. There was no treatment in this study where the researcher compared two groups on the same variables. Hence, the design of the current study is an ex-post facto.

A 40-item vocabulary test which varied across two proficiency levels are used to measure rate of vocabulary attrition as the instrument of this research. In the two stages, after an interval of three months, the students are taken the same tests.

The results revealed that there was no significant difference between EFL attrition rate of abstract and concrete nouns among the continuing students across different proficiency levels however this hypothesis was rejected for the non-continuing learners at intermediate and advanced proficiency level. Furthermore, the results also indicated that there was no significant difference between EFL attrition rate of production nouns among continuing and non-continuing students across different proficiency levels whereas this hypothesis is rejected for reception at advanced level. In addition, it was shown that there was no significant difference between EFL attrition rate of contextualized nouns for continuing and non-continuing students across different proficiency levels whereas there were significant differences between EFL attrition rate of non-contextualized nouns for both groups at advanced level.

Likewise, this study widens the horizon of vocabulary attrition on foreign language researchers since it investigates attrition of English as a foreign language both in those who exceed the period of non-use and those who are still exposed to the language to examine whether or not the latter undergoes attrition.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

Pengurangan Penguasaan Inggeris Seperti Satu Bahasa Asing di kalangan Penuntut Dewasa Persian Penekanan Terhadap Perbendaharan Kata

Oleh

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Pengerusi: Ghazali Bin Mustapha, PhD

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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengurangan penguasaan perbendaharaan kata EFL di kalangan pelajar lelaki dan wanita Iran yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris. Golongan ini merupakan penuntut universiti yang berkecimpung di dalam pelbagai bidang serta berada dalam lingkungan umur 20 dan 25 tahun. Ia juga menentukan sama ada terdapat perbezaan di antara kadar pengurangan penguasaan kata nama konkrit dan kata nama abstrak EFL, penghasilan dan penerimaan kata nama sama ada secara berkonteks atau tidak berkonteks di kalangan pelajar yang mempelajari EFL secara berterusan dan pelajar yang tidak mempelajari EFL secara berterusan dengan tahap kefasihan yang berbeza. Memandangkan tidak terdapat sebarang pemulihan maka penyelidik bertindak membandingkan dua pengukur pembolehubah yang sama dan menentukan hubungan di antara pembolehubah ini. Jadi, reka bentuk kajian ini merupakan kajian kuantitatif (ex-post facto).

Ujian perbendaharaan kata 40 perkara atau item yang berbeza mengikut dua tahap kefasihan digunakan sebagai instrumen untuk kajian ini bagi tujuan mengukur perbendaharaan kata. Di dalam dua peringkat, tersebut, responden sekali lagi akan melalui ujian yang sama selepas tempoh masa selama 3 bulan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan di antara kadar pengurangan penggunaan kata nama abstrak dan kata nama konkrit EFL di kalangan pelajar yang mempelajari EFL secara berterusan dengan tahap kefasihan yang berbeza. Walaubagaimanapun, hipotesis ini ditolak untuk pelajar yang tidak melalui pembelajaran secara berterusan pada tahap kefasihan yang sederhana dan sangat fasih . Selain itu, hasil kajian ini juga menunjukkan tidak terdapat perbezaan signifikan di antara kadar pengurangan penggunaan EFL dari segi penghasilan dan penerimaan kata nama bagi pelajar yang berbeza tahap kefasihan serta tidak melalui pembelajaran secara berterusan di mana hipotesis ini ditolak untuk pelajar yang berada di tahap sangat fasih.

Selain daripada itu, hasil kajian mendapati tiada perbezaan yang signifikan di antara kadar pengurangan penggunaan kata nama EFL berkonteks untuk pelajar yang mempelajari EFL secara berterusan dan pelajar yang tidak mempelajari EFL secara berterusan pada tahap kefasihan yang berbeza. Manakala, terdapat perbezaan signifikan di antara kadar pengurangan penggunaan EFL kata nama berkonteks bagi kedua kedua kumpulan pada tahap kefasihan yang tinggi.

Di samping itu, kajian ini juga meluaskan pengetahuan tentang kajian lain terhadap kadar pengurangan penggunaan bahasa asing memandangkan ia mengkaji pengurangan penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing terhadap mereka yang masih mengingati penggunaan bahasa tersebut walaupun tidak mempraktikkannya untuk satu tempoh masa dan mereka yang masih terdedah dengan penggunaan bahasa tersebut.

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Last but not the least, I am greatly obligated to my beloved parents; my father who invested money & my mother who invested time and energy encouraging me to learn English from childhood. The education of their life to my education has turned my world into a worthy habit.

Azadeh Asgari
April 2009

APPROVAL

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 29th April 2009 to conduct the final examination of Azadeh Asgari on her thesis entitled "Vocabulary Attrition Among Adult English as a Foreign Language Persian Learners" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the relevant degree of Master of Science.
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at U.P.M or other institutions.

AZADEH ASGARI

Date: 9 July 2009

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATH	Activation Threshold Hypothesis
APL	Advanced Proficiency Level for learning English
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
IPL3	Intermediate Proficiency Level for learning English
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
U.Penn	University of Pennsylvania

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In literature, the term 'language loss' and 'language attrition' have been used interchangeably, where language attrition is supposedly applicable to language loss. This is because language loss suggests that linguistic information is totally removed from the memory of an individual, whereas in language attrition, linguistic information becomes inaccessible to the individual (Kopke, 2004). Inaccessibility is a matter of degree and the degree hinges on various reasons such as proficiency levels, social, effective and other personality factors. For language maintenance, forgetting or losing language skills is defined as a problem in recent decades. However, the very fact that those with language attrition can recall linguistic information if they are to be given a hint indicates that linguistic information is not removed and this has became a separate area of research.

Language attrition is preferred in comparison to language loss whereby many psycholinguistics claimed that something which is committed to long term memory cannot be ever removed (Weltens and Grendel, 1993). Therefore, most of the researchers consider “loss” as a misnomer since it implies the disappearance of

information from memory. De Bot, Gommans and Rossing (1991, as cited in Murtagh, 2002) pointed out that "time alone cannot explain decline in skills; rather it is the combination of the lack of language contact and use during that time which brings about the total change"(p.24). "The key to language loss is limited input/intake, on the one hand, and limited output, on the other" (de Bot. K, 2001) (p.73).

The study of language attrition has recently emerged as a new field of study. The conception of loss in language skills occurred in a conference at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) in 1980. This conference is dedicated to the theoretical basis of research in the field of language attrition and other related conferences that probed the process of language loss as a natural disorder from many other perspectives. Kopke (2004) stated that "attrition refers to the natural (non-pathological) loss of a language in bilinguals; generally speaking, changes in the linguistic environment and termination of an instructional program may lead to attrition"(p.15). Thus, after a period of non-language use, learners have known to have experienced varied degrees of attrition. Since the 1980s, researchers have conducted studies to obtain structure of the attrition process in a second or foreign language learner. The same research has propounded a number of hypotheses such as the regression hypotheses, the critical threshold level, the linguistic feature hypotheses and so forth. These hypotheses will be discussed with in detail in chapter two.

In terms of language learning, researchers have used the same framework which involved divergent methods of data collection, sampling and instrumentation on language attrition in papers and publications. The framework promotes terminology of a lost language (first language & second language) and the environment of the language (first language & second language). This taxonomical framework is proposed by Van Els (1986, as cited in Kopke and Schimd, 2004) within which this language attrition research was conducted. The study on language attrition has been classified into the following categories:

1. L1 loss in L1 environment: Dialect loss
2. L1 loss in L2 environment: Immigrant
3. L2 loss in L1 environment: Foreign language attrition
4. L2 loss in L2 environment: Language reversion in elderly people

Hansen (2001a) remarked that "language attrition has been studied for two reasons; First of all, researchers have taken interest in knowing attrition processes and then, it has got considerable pedagogical implications"(p.67). Some researchers have investigated the rate of language attrition in various areas as well as the sub-skills of language attrition with different results. They have conducted different studies on language attrition with significant loss of a language and other learners who came up with slight losses. Researchers have been concerned with the effect of individual, social and affective factors on the rate and amount of language attrition; original proficiency level, attitude, motivation and some other variables can also be attributed to the period of disuse in attrition studies. In short, the social