Intergroup Relations and Achievement of Proficiency in the Dominant Cultural Language of a Multilingual Society

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Abstract*: The exact nature of correlations between intergroup contacts and achievement of proficiency in a dominant cultural language has fascinated – and continues to fascinate – people from a wide variety of backgrounds (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).Since a segment of applied linguistic research has focused on achievement of proficiency in second-or target-language acquisition (SLA or TLA) in a dominant cultural setting and investigated how proficiency in target language acquisition is related to sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and intergroup relations with the dominant culture, two of the second language acquisition models and a theory – Schumann's Acculturation Model (1978b), Giles & Bryne's Accommodation Theory (1982), and Andersen's Nativization Model (1983b) – offer crucial factors on intergroup relations between individual learners and dominant language cultural contacts resulting in attainment of proficiency. The article reviews existing literature and analyzes the correlation of intergroup relations and achievement of proficiency in the target language. The results suggest social and psychological contacts between the learners and dominant target language culture play a vital role in attaining proficiency in the target language. Moreover, they suggest how this socio-psycho-cognitive model of correlations wields significant implications for intergroup relations and individuals' aspiration for achieving proficiency in a dominant cultural language.*

Keywords: Accommodation Theory, Acculturation Model, Cultural Language, Intergroup Relations, SLA, TLA

1. Introduction

Social and psychological contacts among the second language learners and immigrants in multilingual society and dominant culture language play a vital role in achieving proficiency in second-or target-language acquisition (SLA or TLA). Two SLA theories mainly offer mechanism of these subtle contacts between individual learners and target language cultural contracts. They are Schumann's Acculturation Model (1978b) and Giles & Byrne' Accommodation Theory (1982); they offer implications and insights into intergroup relations and attaining proficiency in the dominant cultural language in a multilingual society (i.e., Britain, America, Canada, or Australia). Moreover, they show how these contacts or intergroup relations lead to learners and immigrants' aspirations to achieve linguistic proficiency in the dominant cultural language of a multilingual society.

Language is a crucial aspect of intergroup relations because it can facilitate or hinder communication, cooperation, and integration between different ethnic ingroups and dominant cultural linguistic group, where intergroup relations are the interactions and attitudes held between 'ingroups' and dominant 'outgroup'. These interactions and attitudes can be influenced by various factors such as language, culture, ethnicity, identity, and power. In a multilingual society, where multiple languages coexist and compete for status and recognition, favorable and positive intergroup relations play a crucial and pivotal role in achieving proficiency in the dominant cultural language, i.e., English or French.

2. Materials and Methods

This article undertakes a thorough analysis of the existing literature that explores the correlation between intergroup relations and the achievement of proficiency in a target language. The materials for this review include peer-reviewed articles, books, and other scholarly works that focus on second or target language acquisition (SLA or TLA) in a dominant cultural setting of a multilingual society.

Moreover, the methods employed in this review involve a systematic approach to literature review. The process begins with the identification of relevant literature that investigates the relationship between proficiency in target language acquisition and sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and intergroup relations with the dominant culture. Particular attention is given to studies that utilize Schumann's Acculturation Model (1978b), Giles & Bryne's Accommodation Theory (1982), and Andersen's Nativization Model (1983b).

The final step in the method involves synthesizing the findings from the various studies to draw conclusions about the correlation between intergroup relations and the achievement of proficiency in the target language. This synthesis also includes an examination of the implications of these findings for intergroup relations and individuals' aspiration for achieving proficiency in a dominant cultural language.

Needless to say, it is pertinent to note that this review is limited to the literature published until the time of writing, and future research may provide further insights and the results should be interpreted bearing this in mind.

2.1. The Acculturation Model

The Acculturation Model of second language acquisition was propounded by Schumann in 1978. Acculturation can be defined as the integration of a second language learner (or immigrant) with a target language culture. Schumann himself explains the correlation between acculturation and second language acquisition as follows: "… second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language" (Schumann, 1978a, p. 34).

Brown (1980a) defines acculturation as "the process of becoming adapted to a new culture" (p. 129). Acculturation - and accordingly second language acquisition - is determined by social and psychological variables which are also termed as social and psychological distances between the learner and the target language culture. Consequently, these are social and psychological variables affect the quantity and quality of the learner's contact with a target language community to which they are exposed to.

Social distance is the result of a number of factors, which affect the learner as a member of a social group in contact with the target language group. *Psychological distance,* on the other hand*,* is the result of various affective factors, which concern the learner as an individual. The social factors are primary and the psychological ones are secondary that come into play in cases where the social distance is indeterminant, i.e., where social factors constitute neither a clearly positive nor a clearly negative influence on acculturation (Ellis, 1999).

Social variables determine the contracts and describe whether the overall learning situation is 'good' or 'bad'. They can be of varying degrees or amounts depending on the situations. Ushioda (1993) cites Schumann (1978b) to refer how close an individual comes in contact with dominant cultural target language and includes the following seven distinguishable variables for quantitative exposure and analytical nature:

1. **Political, economic and cultural equality of a target language and an L2 group**: The target language and second language (L2) groups should view each other as socially equal. If one group is dominant over the other, the optimal second language acquisition will not occur. Therefore, if

two groups are approximately equal, the contact between the groups' members will be greater, and the second language acquisition will be more effective.

2. **Assimilation, adaptation and preservation**: The preferable condition for second language acquisition is when an L2 group wants to assimilate with the target language group, and adapt to its culture. However, the second language acquisition will not be favorable when the L2 group desires to preserve cultural and linguistic entity and remain linguistically and culturally isolated from the target language group.

3. **Enclosure**: The more social institutions the target language group and the L2 group have in common, the better input conditions for second language acquisition prevail. In other words, the social enclosure should be low for the attainment of optimal proficiency in the dominant language.

4. **Cohesiveness and size**: The L2 group should neither be too large in size, nor cohesive in nature in order to provide a good contact between the members of the L2 group and target language group, and hence supply optimal input conditions for second language acquisition.

5. **Congruence**: The more corresponding similarities are there between the cultures of the two groups, the better input conditions for second language acquisition are likely to prevail. Consequently, 'input' can be converted into 'intake', resulting in better output of the dominant cultural language.

6. **Attitude**: Both groups need to have positive attitudes towards each other for the conditions of second language acquisition to be favorable.

7. **Intended length of residence**: When the L2 group members wish to stay in the target language environment for an extended period of time, the acquisition process and motivation to learn will be more likely to occur.

The above social variables suggest that an example of 'bad' learning situation is when the conditions are opposites of the ones described above. However, it is possible to have varying amounts of social distance. As a result, learners or immigrants' success in SLA or TLA depends on the 'good' or 'bad' learning situations.

In contrast, *psychological factors* are 'affective' in nature. They are determinant of individual learner's qualitative input contacts for optimal second language acquisition and learning. Schumann has again listed the following four situations (Schumann, 1978b, as cited in Ellis, 1999, p. 252):

1. **Language shock**: It is characterized by the feelings that a learner experiences while using the second language, i.e., the feelings of confusion, doubt, anxiety, etc.

2. **Culture shock**: The learner experiences disorientation, stress, fear, etc. as a result of differences between their own culture and that of the target language community.

3. **Motivation**: It is a factor affecting an L2 learner's desire to learn a target language instrumentally or integratively, where integrative motivation is overall absorption and achievement of proficiency and instrumental motivation, by contrast, is just the desire to achieve something, e.g., get a job.

4. **Ego boundaries**: It is the extent to which an individual L2 learner is ready to accept the new identity resulting from the membership in a target language community. If they are highly orientated to target language community, better input situation prevails. On the other hand, if they are poorly orientated, worse learning and absorbing environment exists.

Social and psychological variables influence SLA by determining the quantitative and qualitative contacts respectively with the target language that the learner comes in contact with and experiences. Psychological variables also determine the degree to which the learner is open to that incoming 'input' which is available for 'intake'. Therefore, the learner will receive very little L2 input in 'bad' learning situations. In addition, when psychological distance is high, the learner will fail to convert available input into intake, resulting in attaining poor SLA or TLA.

Schumann (1986) opines that the level of acquisition of second language is tantamount to the level the learners acculturate to the target language. He further argues that psychological factors are related to the individual and can affect SLA and ultimately acculturation. He says "an individual may learn under social conditions which are not favorable for SLA and may not learn under social conditions that appear to be favorable" (Schumann, 1986, p. 382).

According to Schumann, the same processes that underlie the emergence of pidgin languages also operate in the initial stages of second language acquisition. He proposes the pidginization hypothesis, which states that when the learners experience a high degree of social and psychological distance from the target language community, they do not advance beyond the early stages, resulting in a pidginized language. He illustrates this hypothesis with the case of Alberto Cancino, a 33-year-old Costa Rican worker in the US, who had limited contact with native speakers due to his night shift work. His English exhibited many of the features typical of pidgins, such as 'no + V' negation, uninverted questions, lack of possessive and plural markers, and a simplified verb system (Ellis, 1999).

After studying Alberto's speech, Schumann concluded that age and intelligence were not the causes of his fossilization, but rather a 'social and psychological distance' (contacts) from the second language speaking group. Significant insights can be gained by attempting to account for his failure to achieve proficiency in SLA. It also sheds light on what is involved in successful second language acquisition in general.Schumann suggests that a learner's language becomes pidginized when they fail to get through early stages of acquisition due to social and/or psychological distance as Schumann (1978a) maintains: "pidginization may characterize all early second language acquisition and … under conditions of social and psychological distance it persists" (p.110). When it persists, the learner fossilizes. Consequently, they no longer revise their interlanguage system Selinker (1972) in the direction of the target language.

2.2 Accommodation Theory

Accommodation Theory derives from the research of Giles & Byrne (1982) into the intergroup uses of language in multilingual communities such as London, Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles. Like Schumann, Giles & Byrne explain SLA from the stance of ingroup. The theory operates within a socio-psychological framework, drawing on the work of Gardener and Lambert (1972) in the Canadian context. Its primary concern is to investigate how intergroup uses of language reflect basic social and psychological attitudes in interethnic communication and its importance lies in the perceived social differences between linguistic and cultural groups.

Giles sets out to answer the relationship between the learners' social group (termed as 'ingroup') and the target language community (termed as 'outgroup'). He argues that how the ingroup defines itself in relationship to outgroup is important for SLA. In Schumann's Acculturation Model, there is a tendency to consider social and psychological distances as static or changing slowly over time. However, Giles perceives ingroup relationships subject to constant negotiation during the course of each negotiation. Therefore, the intergroup relationships are dynamic and fluctuate according to the shifting views of identity held by each group to the other (Ellis, 1999). This model explains the profile of a person from a subordinate group, that is likely to acquire the language of the dominant group.

According to Giles and Coupland (1991), the learner is likely to show the following characteristics:

1. **Identification of the individual learner with ethnic ingroup**: It is the extent to which a learner sees himself as a member of specific ingroup, separate from the outgroup. Therefore, the learner has a relatively weak identification with their own ethnic group. They do not see themselves as purely a member of their minority language group, separate from the dominant culture language group.

2. **Inter-ethnic comparison**: The learner makes favorable comparison between their own ingroup and the outgroup. The learner should not regard their ethnic ingroup as inferior to the dominant cultural outgroup. This will be influenced by learner's awareness of the status of their own ingroup's position. They may feel or perceive that the intergroup situation is fair or unfair. An ideal outgroup language learner here is not obviously concerned with a difference of status.

3. **Perception of ethno-linguistic vitality**: It refers whether the learner perceives their ingroup as holding low or high status and as sharing or excluding from institutional power. Giles and Byrne (1982) talk of ethno-linguistic vitality in terms of:

   a. economic, historic, social, political, and linguistic status of the ethnic group;

   b. size and distribution of the ethnic group, mixed marriages, amount of in-migration, and out-migration; and

   c. institutional support for the ethnic group (i.e., mass media, education, religion, industry, services, culture, and government).

4. **Perception of ingroup boundaries**: It is characterized as to what extent the ingroup boundaries are 'soft and open' and not 'hard and closed'. This suggests whether the learner sees their ingroup as culturally and linguistically related to the outgroup (soft and open) or separate from the outgroup (hard and closed).

5. **Identification with other ingroup social categories**: It refers whether the learner identifies themselves with few or several other ingroup social categories (e.g., occupational, religious, gender, or power). Identifying or sharing these ingroup social categories indicates whether they hold adequate or inadequate status within their ingroup.

Giles agrees with Gardner (1979) that motivation is the primary determinant of second language proficiency; it is to a great extent affected by how individual learners view themselves in terms of ethnic identity. Motivation may be high as a result of favorable socio-psychological attitudes, and hence resulting in success of the ingroup's SLA. By contrast, motivation may be low as a result of unfavorable socio-psychological attitudes and whether the learner succeeds in formal language context will depend instead on intelligence and aptitude because they are less likely to reap benefits of informal language acquisition.

Besides determining the overall level of proficiency achieved in SLA, Accommodation Theory also accounts for learner's variable linguistic output. Giles and his associates write that"…people are continually modifying their speech with others so as to reduce or accentuate the linguistic (and hence) social differences between them depending on their perceptions of the interactive situation" Giles et al., 1977, pp. 307-348).

Moreover, Giles distinguishes two types of change which occur in the second language speaker's use of 'ethnic speech marker'. Upward convergence involves the attenuation or reduction of ingroup speech markers. It occurs when the learner is positively and integratively motivated toward the outgroup community (i.e., when their socio-psychological attitudes are favorable). It is the expectation that people in subordinate group would converge to those in superordinate positions.

Therefore, Giles's key idea is 'social accommodation'. This explains how learners' social group affects the course and pace of SLA or TLA. He suggests that when people interact with each other, they either try to make their speech similar to that of their addressee to emphasize linguistic and social cohesiveness (convergence) or to make it different to emphasize their social distinctiveness (divergence). It is said that successful second language acquisition involves 'long-term convergence' (Ellis, 2003).

Other theorists and linguists use the terms convergence and divergence. They are of the opinion that convergence is the desire for gaining approval and acceptance. Converging learners are considered more favorably and regarded as more efficient in their communication and cooperation. Gudykunst (1995) considers converging is a common linguistic style and improves the effectiveness of communication. It has also been associated with increased predictability of the other and hence lowering of uncertainty, interpersonal anxiety, and mutual understanding. Dragojevic et al. (2015) say "Convergence refers to adjusting one's communicative behaviors to be more similar to another's" (pp. 36-37).

Furthermore, cultural linguist Jackson (2019) thinks that convergence occurs when individuals (e.g., second language speakers or immigrants) adjust their speech patterns to match those of people belonging to another group (e.g., first language speakers who may possess different (and often more powerful and dominant) social and cultural identities from themselves).

In contrast, downward divergence involves accentuation or prominence of ethnic speech markers. It is the scenario where the learner is not positively motivated toward the outgroup (i.e., when their socio-psychological attitudes are unfavorable). Therefore, the occurrence of upward convergence or downward divergence can fluctuate as a result of ongoing assessment of the learner in relation to their ingroup and the outgroup community (Giles, 1979). In this connection, Jackson (2019) opines that divergence occurs when individuals (i.e., second language speakers) adjust their speech patterns to be distinct from those people belonging to another group (e.g., first language speakers who possess different social and cultural identities from themselves).

To explain concisely, "A shift in speech style toward that of another is termed convergence, whereas a shift away from other's style of speech represents divergence" (Giles et al., 1977, pp. 307-348).Upward convergence will be characterized by attention to form and to the use of careful style. In context to achieving proficiency in SLA, progress takes place when the overall predisposition of the learner is toward upward convergence. Reversely, downward divergence will be characterized by an absence of attention to form and a reliance on the vernacular style, and fossilization occurs when the overall predisposition of the learner is toward downward divergence. Therefore, diverging or conversing may represent aspects of style-shifting involving the vernacular-careful style continuum.

2.3. The Nativization Model

The Nativization Model (1983b) by Andersen has some insightful similarities with Schumann's model and offers cognitive aspects of language learning process. He postulates language acquisition as a process predetermined by two notions, 'nativization' and 'denativization'.

Nativization is characterized by *assimilation*, which takes place when learners seek a concordance or harmony with the input.Assimilation refers to the scenario where a subordinate group (i.e., ingroup) adopts the characteristics of the outgroup to achieve equal footing with that group. There are similar many instances taking place in Western countries. The ethnic ingroup live and seek more positive identity in the context of assimilating into the host country. They want to assimilate culturally and linguistically to reap the benefits of the host country society. This is another form of convergence to the linguistic norms of the target host culture (Giles et al. 1977).

Jackson (2019) incorporates a broader cultural view of assimilation and opines:

> Assimilation occurs when individuals do not retain their original cultural identity and link to their heritage/culture; instead, they seek close interaction with the host culture, and adopt the cultural values, norms and traditions of the new society. People who assimilate into the new culture are apt to focus on mastering the host language and rarely use their first language. When they have children, they may use their second language at home and their children may grow up knowing very little about their heritage and the first language of their parents and grandparents. (p.187)

Here the learner complies with their own internalized view of what constitutes an L2 system. Consequently, the learner has a tendency to oversimplify the learning process to make hypotheses based on the knowledge of their first language. Then they fit to what Andersen refers to as 'internal norm' (Ellis, 1999). Nativization is also evident in pidginization as well as in early stages of first and second language acquisition.

Denativization, by contrast*,* is associated with *accommodation* where the learner adapts their inner system of the target language to the input they receive, i.e., they adjust their internalized L2 (inner interlanguage) system to make it fit for the input. The learners make their internalized systems fit the input they receive. Hence, learners use their inference strategies to reshape their interlanguage to be compatible with the 'external norm' (i.e., linguistic properties of the input they receive).

Giles and Ogay (2007) refer accommodation as a constant movement by changing communicative behavior. By doing this, learners make sure that the input suit the acceptable norms of the dominant cultural language. Needless to say, denativization is a part of depiginization as well as later stages of first and second language acquisition.

The Nativization Model, like Acculturation Model, suggests why L2 learners often fail to achieve native-life competence. With regard to the Nativization Model and linguistic interference strategies, Ellis makes the following is crucial observation:

> The notions of 'internal norm' and 'external norm' are crucial devices for Andersen's attempt to show how early and late interlanguage systems are very different. Characterizing SLA as the gradual transition of attention from an internal to an external norm explains the developmental sequence which has been observed in SLA, and the switch that learners make from reliance on simplifying to reliance on inferencing strategies. (Ellis, 1999, p. 254)

3. Results and Discussion

Schumann's Acculturation Model suggests bicultural integration as a means of acculturation. It is also found that Schumann's environment-oriented model emphasizes identification with the dominant linguistic group as a prerequisite although he oversimplifies the complex socio-psychological factors of SLA or TLA. Furthermore, his emphasis on the relations between learners-immigrants and target language community has been controversial because it does not detail the individual differences among the learners and migrants.

Moreover, Schumann's model provides us with a useful framework for understanding how second language learners adapt to a new cultural and linguistic environment and how this affects their language learning outcomes. Although this model is influenced by a liberal ideology, it suggests that learners who are willing and able to integrate into the target language community and adopt its values will have more input opportunities and hence accelerate achieving proficiency in the dominant cultural language. Conversely, learners who maintain a high degree of social and psychological distance from the target language culture will face more hindrance in achieving proficiency in the dominant language. Therefore, the model implies for creation of favorable conditions that facilitate the acculturation process and reduce the social and psychological distance between learners and the target language culture.

Giles & Byrne's Accommodation Theory introduces two insightful concepts of (upward) convergence and (downward) divergence. A novel dimension of the theory is that it takes ethnic identity into consideration, which is an important factor for many SLA learners and immigrants. In addition, it provides us with the mechanism of language-learner language variability. Although the strength of Accommodation Theory lies in its encompassing notion of language acquisition and language use within a single framework, the theory does not - like the Acculturation Model - explain internal mechanisms of how a learner acquires a second language. It is also doubtful whether this theory can be applied to foreign language learning, where intergroup interactions are not an obvious issue. Therefore, it is only applicable when the learners and immigrants live and learn in the dominant cultural target language community of a multilingual society.

In addition, the theory focuses on the role of power and status in influencing speakers' accommodation strategies. According to this theory, speakers (ingroup) who have lower power or status in a dominant cultural setting tend to converge to more to the speech and communication style of the higher-status group (outgroup). The theory offers a useful perspective on how speakers adjust their language and communication behavior to cope with the power and status differences in a dominant cultural environment. In addition, the theory shows that speakers are not only influenced by their interlocutors, but also by the larger social and cultural context in which they communicate. In other words, the theory explains how speakers adjust their speech and communication style to accommodate to their interlocutors, either by converging (becoming more similar) or diverging (becoming more different). Moreover, it sheds light on how speakers' accommodation strategies can have positive or negative consequences for their intergroup relations, socio-cultural identity, and attaining proficiency in the dominant cultural target language.

Andersen's Nativization Model elaborates a lot on internal and external norms and suggests that they play a crucial role in understanding SLA learner's internal mechanisms. Although the model sheds ample light on how L2 knowledge is internalized, it does not offer specification on learner's assembly mechanisms. In addition, the model considers internal and external factors in the form of 'assimilation' and 'accommodation', but there is no detailed discussion on how they operate. Like Schumann, he does not pay attention to potentially facilitating effects of input or interaction.

Furthermore, the model emphasizes cognitive development and attempts to explain the similarities and differences between pidginization, creolization, and second language acquisition. The theory proposes that these processes involve two general forces: nativization and denativization. Nativization is the tendency of language learners to create an independent linguistic system that is partly autonomous from the input language and reflects their internal grammar. By contrast, denativization is the tendency of language learners to modify their linguistic system to accommodate to the external norms of the target language and the social context.

4. Conclusion

Intergroup relations are the interactions between different ethnic minority ingroups and majority dominant outgroup. These relations can be influenced by various factors such as language, culture, and ethnicity. Linguistic and cultural environment affects their achievement of proficiency in a dominant cultural language. Therefore, it is important to promote favorable and harmonious intergroup relations and culture for attaining target language linguistic proficiency. The critical analysis of the above models and theory shows that SLA or TLA learners and immigrants are not passive recipients of linguistic input, but active agents who can shape their own language systems according to their needs, goals, and ongoing negotiations. Moreover, the analysis of the models and theory explain how speakers in a minority community can overcome the barriers and challenges of learning the target language by adjusting their speech and communication style to suit their interlocutors and situations.

The exploration of the relationship between intergroup contacts and proficiency in a dominant cultural setting has been a subject of interest for researchers across various disciplines. This review article focuses on the field of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, particularly second or target language acquisition in a dominant cultural setting and provides a comprehensive analysis of this correlation. The results underscore the significant role of social and psychological contacts between learners and the dominant target language culture in achieving language proficiency. Furthermore, the socio-psycho-cognitive model of correlations presents substantial implications for intergroup relations and individuals' aspirations to achieve proficiency in a dominant cultural language. This review, therefore, not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge but also opens avenues for future research in this domain. It is hoped that these insights will continue to fascinate and inspire researchers, educators, and learners alike in their pursuit of understanding and mastering the dynamics of language acquisition in the multilingual setting of dominant cultural language. Consequently, this can help us understand how second language learners and immigrants adapt to a new linguistic and cultural environment and how this affects their achievement of proficiency in the dominant cultural target language, i.e., English or French.

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