

PROPENSITY OF BAGOBO-TAGABAWA STUDENTS IN LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: FROM THE BACKDROP OF LINGUISTIC PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of the Bagobo-Tagabawa in terms of their propensity in learning the English language from the backdrop of linguistic pluralism. This study also aimed to determine the elements that shape their propensities in learning the English language and to discover the insights that could be shared by the informants to their peers and to the academe in general. This study utilized the purposive sampling technique which included Bagobo-Tagabawa grade six students. Twelve Bagobo-Tagabawa grade six students were the informants and six teachers were the members of the Focus Group Discussion. In-Depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion were employed in the data collection. Utilizing thematic analysis, various themes were identified in the study. For the propensity of Bagobo-Tagabawa students in learning the English language, attitude towards English, perplexity in learning the language, fear of making mistakes, covert appreciation for English, learning and monitoring strategies were the themes. The elements that shape the propensities of the students in learning the English Language included, interlanguage, study habit, timidity, attendance, teacher intervention. The insights shared by informants and participants were, proud of being Bagobo-Tagabawa, preference for the Bagobo-Tagabawa language, and partiality to Cebuano next to native tongue.

Keywords: Bagobo-Tagabawa, Propensity of Students, Learning the English Language, Linguistic Pluralism.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization transforms the educational milieu and makes English language stands at the very center of the global language system. While these interactions give rise to the existence of linguistic pluralism environment, millions of school-aged children do not have access to education in their mother-tongues just like the case of the Bagobo-Tagabawa students who speak varied languages at home and in their community, yet, the language is not used in instruction in education system. This puts students at a disadvantage paving to a declined academic achievement and making them feel unwelcome in school, because of the exclusion of minority language.

The present state of teaching and learning is characterized as the age of socially networked where students are technology soaked. With the rapid shift toward globalization, the world is finding itself for convergence in education where English has spread its role as a universal grammar and has stand at the very center of the global language system (Adams, 2007; Coyle, 2007; Moore, 2011). English language as a universal language has maintained its post notwithstanding the pluralism of various languages in a particular country.

In societies of diverse population where cultural community exists, children from linguistic minority families must learn the language of the society to take full advantage of the educational opportunities. The timing and the conditions under which they come into contact with English, however, can profoundly affect the retention and continued use of their primary languages as well as the development of their second language (Bruton, 2011; Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 2008).

Since globalization has placed a growing importance on English as central language of communication, it comes naturally that English literacy is important to a certain extent hence, the cultural communities of Barangay Binaton, Mati, and Balabag in Digos City are not spared from the trend of linguistic globalization. In these schools, children from linguistic community families speak Bagobo-Tagabawa as their native language, Cebuano and Tagalog as the mother-tongue in school and community while English as one of the media of instruction.

English as a Second Language instructional pedagogy seems not fully adequate to meet the needs of the ever-growing and expanded emphasis on oral communication among the students (Basterrechea, García Mayo, and Leeser, 2014). The Bagobo-Tagabawa students, the participants of this research, speak varied languages in their community are of no exception to this reality. Every day, these students continue to struggle in their difficulties to attempt in learning even only the basic of English.

These Bagobo-Tagabawa students as English language learners face a plethora of problems as they begin to acquire their basic education. Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2013) believed that the problems in learning English language stem primarily from linguistic and cultural differences and it is important that teachers must understand these problems so that they can provide these students the help they need. García Mayo (2012) noticed some problems of cultural community students in learning the English language. He noted that these students experienced language shock which is perhaps the most common phenomenon that language learners experienced in an environment with linguistic pluralism.

The above scenario characterized the three identified schools where the key informants of this study came from. The mismatches between the mother-tongue of the key informants and the language of the dominant or majority group used as the language of formal instruction are justifiably viewed as a major educational issue for linguistic communities in multilingual settings and in this study in particular (Brooker, 2006; Kenner, 2005; Agirdag, 2009).

This study was conducted at the three elementary schools with Bagobo-Tagabawa students mainly composed the school population. These schools are Binaton Elementary Elementary School, the Indigenous Peoples Pilot school, Mati Elementary School, and Balabag Elementary School, Digos City Division.

Students from these three schools speak Bagobo-Tagabawa in their homes and mixed of Tabagobo-Tagabawa and Cebuano and Tagalog in their community, English and Filipino are used in school as the media of instruction. In school, students are encouraged to speak English and Filipino during class discussions, hence, these students are in the setting of linguistic pluralism.

To date, rarely one can find readings regarding the Bagobo-Tagabawa student's inclination in learning the English language and linguistic pluralism. The researcher not comes across of a

similar study especially in the local context. This undertaking therefore can be considered as a blueprint of new knowledge and additional information to the existing ideas on linguistic pluralism. It is in this considerable perspective that the researcher decided to conduct the study with a hope that this may contribute to the body of knowledge in sociolinguistics. The conception of this study was more than timely so as to address the growing problems posed by linguistic pluralism.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the propensities of Bagobo-Tagabawa students in learning the English language?
2. What elements shape the propensities of Bagobo-Tagabawa students in learning the English language?
3. What insights can the informants share to their peers and to the academe in general?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is seen through the lens of Interlanguage theory of Larry Selinker (1972) which states that an interlanguage is an emerging linguistic system that has been developed by a learner of a second language (L2) who has not become fully proficient but is only approximating the target language: preserving some features of their first language (L1) in speaking or writing the target language and creating innovations. An interlanguage is uniquely based on the learners' experiences with the L2. It can ossify in any of its developmental stages. In interlanguage, learner uses different learning strategies such as language transfer, overgeneralisation and simplification.

This theory holds true to the experiences of the Bagobo-Tagabawa students placed in a setting of linguistic pluralism environment. At home, these students speak their native tongue which is Bagobo-Tagabawa and Cebuano in their community, thus, they have difficulty speaking English, the language in the classroom. The Bagobo-Tagabawa students are apprehensive to speak English because the moment they begin to speak in the target language, their native language interferes.

In most cases, language teachers and learners alike know that oral proficiency in the target language can be a challenge and it is a necessary part of learning a language. Like the Bagobo-Tagabawa students, they may feel worried about their competencies in the target language. They consciously monitor their use of English too much, focusing more on accuracy than fluency which in turn prevents them from English communicatively.

In the case of Bagobo-Tagabawa students, they are apprehensive in participating in the different speech activities in the class for the fear that they commit errors in sentence construction, pronunciation and grammar of the target language. The lack of confidence stems from the fear that their classmates might laugh at their mistakes the moment they produce the Bagobo-Tagabawa and Cebuano terms or expressions instead of English. Poor participation of the student affects competence of the target language. The interference of the native language results in greater difficulty in performing well academically. Interlanguage can mean influence of the first language in learning the target language.

METHODOLOGY

This study made use phenomenology and was exploratory in nature; thus, any facets of information that may be derived are all fluid, subjective, and given from the perspective and the understanding of the participants.

This phenomenological study on “The Propensity of Bagobo-Tagabawa Students in Learning the English Language: From the backdrop of Linguistic Pluralism” was conducted to gain understanding of the plight of the students in terms of their propensity in learning the English language in a multilingual community through their day-to-day experiences in the academe. The qualitative research explored and described how students interact with their classmates and teachers in the teaching and learning situation.

First, the researcher wrote research questions that explored the meaning of lived experiences for individuals, and asked individuals to describe these experiences. The researcher then collected the data, typically via in-depth interviews, from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Next, was the data analysis which involved horizontalization, extracting significant statements from transcribed interviews.

The significant statements were transformed into clusters of meanings according to how each statement belonged under specific psychological and phenomenological concepts. Moreover, these transformations were tied up together to make a general description of the experience – both the textural description (of what was experienced) and the structural description (of how it was experienced). Finally, the report was written such that readers can understand better the essential, invariant structure of the experience or essence of the experience.

In this study, the researcher documented the conditions of linguistic pluralism of the schools of the informants hence, this study used phenomenology describing the phenomenon of the informants in the linguistic pluralism environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PROPENSITY OF BAGOBO-TAGABAWA STUDENTS IN LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

There were five essential themes emerged out from the analysis of data for research question number one. The first essential theme as one of the propensities of Bagobo-Tagabawa students in learning the English language is *Attitude towards English*. This finding is in consonance with the statement of Horwitz (2010) which stressed that students hesitate to speak English with their teachers and friends in or outside the classroom because they worried about making grammatical mistakes and felt embarrassed of their low language proficiency. This is due to the negative physical response, such as a smirk, that they received from other more proficient speakers when learners spoke incorrectly.

The second essential theme that is generated from question number 1 is *Perplexity in Learning the Language*. This theme is consonance with the idea of Slabakova (2006) that says

ESSENTIAL THEMES	THEMATIC STATEMENT
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH	Do not like English Cannot understand English in its entirety Dislike English pronunciation different from its spelling Feeling strange when speaking English Not accustomed to speaking the language Need for utmost patience in learning English So much struggle to understand English Difficulty in relating with teachers and intelligent classmates Wondering if English can be spoken slowly
PERPLEXITY IN LEARNING THE LANGUAGE	Confused with subject-verb agreement Confused with singular-plural words Having hard time guessing the meaning of English words Reading without understanding Difficult sentence patterns Difficult spelling Having limited/very poor English vocabulary Do not know how to construct correct English sentences Have difficulty in reading English during oral recitation Know only very few English words Do not know even very simple English terms Prefer Cebuano for discussion, always requesting teacher
FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES	Hesitant to speak for fear of being ridiculed Classmates laughing when English word is mispronounced Prefer to be silent than speaking English during discussion Do not answer teacher if asked; do not know how to express ideas in English Not comfortable joining class discussion Cannot participate in discussion do not know how to speak English
COVERT APPRECIATION OF ENGLISH	Like to speak English but not capable to do so Aware of the need for English competence for future employment Making extreme efforts to learn English for future use
LEARNING AND MONITORING STRATEGIES	Ask assistance from teachers after class Ask help of classmates Ask help of parents/relatives at home for assistance Study lessons Taking notes Study English assignment at night Can share ideas if allowed to speak Cebuano They learn from their mistakes Mistakes are avenues for learning

learning English language is one of the struggles of cultural community students. Learning English is difficult because of its various vocabularies, complicated grammar, and its hard accent. Goldshneider and DeKeyser (2005) added that English language has a lot of words. These words are not easy to remember for most of cultural community students (Baralt and Gurzynski-Weiss, 2011; Turula, 2008).

The third essential theme that emerged in this research question is *Fear of Making Mistakes*. Gregory (2008) proposed that negative experiences and fear of negative judgment from others hindered effective language learning and development among the ESL learners. Learners need to be aware that making mistakes are parts and parcel of language learning and teachers need to constantly reassure and encourage them to continue learning.

The fourth essential theme that emerged for research question number 1 is *Covert Appreciation for English*. Brock and Swiniarski (2008) believed that regardless of the negative feelings of the students towards learning English language, they still value the proficiency they will develop for they believe that their competence will help them in the future.

One of the essential themes that emerged from question number 1 is *Learning and Monitoring Strategies*. According to Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) it is a common thing that students ask help from peers to learn. This is the way that students get to improve themselves after they sought assistance from peers.

It can be gleaned that from the aforementioned themes that emerged, there are varied propensities that Bagobo-Tagabawa students experience in learning the English language in a setting of linguistic pluralism. Those experiences are determinant whether or not the student is going to be successful in academic pursuit. The same experiences which need to be addressed in order to help the students from those difficulty so the students will eventually enjoy teaching and learning activities.

ELEMENTS THAT SHAPE THE PROPENSITIES OF STUDENTS IN LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The first theme that emerged in this research question is *Interlanguage*. From the point of view of Gillborn (2008), students normally experience difficulty in learning new language. This happens because students are very comfortable using their own language that any practice that requires them to master new language can be stressful to them if not uninteresting. Making the students learn new language can bring them language confusion which in turn results in a reduction in the ability to think and hamper their ability to express their ideas in a class discussion.

The second theme that emerged in this research question is *Study Habits*. A good study habit of the students will help them improve their learning in the target language while poor study habits precipitates slow mastery or learning of the target language. When students spend considerable time reading books, noting important points in the lesson, and making assignments at home, learning can be easy. In this aspect, Brock and Swiniarski (2008) stated that establishing a good study habit will bring the possibility of a good performance in acquiring language competence.

The third theme that emerged under research question number 2 is *Timidity*. One of the common activities that teachers give to students is role playing where students are going to make simulation or create a scene and script. Students tend to be timid in some speech activities in the classroom and they need to overcome this weakness. Rothman and Cabrelli Amaro (2010) stressed that there are students who lack necessary confidence in participating classroom activities especially those which require them to speak. Montrul, Dias and Santos (2011) added that students tend to be timid in joining class discussion because they are too shy to share their ideas and they are not confident of their answer so they choose to be passive than participate in the class activities.

Another theme that emerged in question number 2 is *Attendance*. For students to learn, regular attendance in class helps the students to acquire learning. English as a second language can be difficult to learn if students are not regularly attending classes since there are

many important points to master in English that good attendance will help the students easily learn English (Abutalebi and Green, 2007).

Teacher Intervention is also one essential theme that is generated from question number 1. In learning second language, students must be participative in the different class

ESSENTIAL THEMES	THEMATIC STATEMENT
INTERLANGUAGE/INTERFERENCE	Frustrated when speaking in English since Bagobo-Tagabawa and Cebuano terms interfere Our own mother tongue is always in our mind Speaking too many languages led to confusion Too many languages did not help us learn English readily Difficult to learn a new language when you are comfortable with your native language Translating Bagobo-Tagabawa to English results to wrong sentences and phrases
STUDY HABIT	Seldom read books Poor study habits
TIMIDITY	Lack confidence Feeling awkward when speaking in English Too shy to participate in class discussion Choose to be silent than answer questions in class Do not have the nerve to make class report
ATTENDANCE	Absenteeism Inattentive to class discussion
TEACHER INTERVENTION	Teachers always require students to participate in class discussion to develop our English Speech activities teacher requires to participate: class discussion, role playing, reporting, simulation, oral recitation, dialogue Student quite fair in role playing but not in discussion Teacher exerting utmost effort to motivate students to learn English

activities as these activities help them understand better the lesson. Students' participation in the class activities will also help them acquire meaningful learning (Hayes, 2005).

INSIGHTS SHARED BY INFORMANTS AND PARTICIPANTS

Research question number 3 generated three essential themes after data analysis. The first theme is *Proud of being Bagobo-Tagabawa*. Bixar, Pimentel and Juárez (2008) said that most indigenous peoples are proud of their diversity and of their dialect and knowledge systems. In some cases, their unique cultural assets may help them raise their standards of living.

Helmberger (2006) added that indigenous peoples are proud of their unique culture and traditions, and their language and they wanted to be an advocate for protecting endangered and disappearing Indigenous languages. They honor the profound importance of language and its use in building meaningful and lasting relationships, between people, between tribes, and between Indigenous communities and the rest of the world.

The second essential that theme that emerged is *Preference for the Bagobo-Tagabawa Dialect*. McMaster and Austin (2005) said that in today's generation, the Indigenous Peoples are empowered and they wanted to preserve their culture more than ever by having schools utilize their local stories in the class discussion and by creating instructional materials that is culture-based and using own dialect inside the classroom.

Today, members of the indigenous peoples group stand proud of their identity. The acknowledgment of the Indigenous Peoples right to Free, Prior and Informed consent (FPIC) had served as dual purpose of not only safeguarding indigenous peoples' rights and interests but also ensures that greater common good. This empowerment brought changes to themselves, added Baker (2001).

One essential theme generated in question number 3 is *Partiality to Cebuano next to Native Tongue*. The members of a cultural community often choose their second language which they find comfort in using instead of utilizing a foreign language. In most cases, the cultural community disagreed with teachers who were adamant about speaking only English in the classroom and also imposing similar practice upon the students. They opined that is necessary for teachers to explain certain procedures and meanings in their mother-tongues so that they can fully comprehend the teachers' explanation.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the result of this academic inquiry, I opted to point out several remarks.

First, varied life experiences of Bagobo-Tagabawa students contributed to their being academically disengaged. Those experiences varying from personal, social, and even familial and parental can be connected to making these students experience academic disengagement.

Second, three issues are pointed out by the participants about their linguistic difficulties. Those issues include participating in class discussion, expressing ideas, and constructing sentences.

Third, the coping mechanism that the research participants employed in overcoming the linguistic barriers being in a linguistic pluralism setting and these include seek help from peers, practice speaking English, and ask assistance from teacher. These measures could either help or hinder in their pursuit to be academically engaged.

Finally, as regards to my study, I could say that the research participants experience academic disengagement. This is manifested in their recognition that they cannot participate in class discussion, express their ideas, and construct sentences. I personally believe that these concerns may be addressed should the teachers will make their instructional practices culturally relevant, and that classrooms should be spaces in which students find a sense of belonging, in which students believe that their teachers understand them, and in which instructional activities reflect students' experiences by building on their prior knowledge. With the implications I presented, I can say that academic disengagement may be lessened if not totally eradicated.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Clearly, what I have written are not the last words on this topic and there is much more that needs to be done in this field. From the onset, I recognized that this research lacks the level of generalizability that researchers and scholars hope to see. But for topics such as this, the academic experiences of the participants of this research may be far different from students of different ethnic origins. I believe that smaller-scaled, micro studies are needed to fully understand all the nuances of experience that the participants of the study endure.

I also believe that there is a room for a greater variety of perspectives concerning the propensity in learning the English language among the research participants. I choose to write from the perspectives of the research participants, but another study could examine the academic life of these participants through the lens of the teachers.

There are also certainly for other research opportunities to consider in terms of the research participant's demographics. My study is only limited to the propensity of students in learning the English Language, the issue on culturally relevant pedagogical practices of teacher might warrant a separate research endeavor.

Beyond the issue of location, level, and perspective, I also believe that there are larger issues that require future research concerning academic the propensity of the participants in learning the English language in the setting of linguistic pluralism. Many students in different cultural affiliations across the country continue to be academically disengaged. More research need to be done so that they will be learning engagement to take place to these students.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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