

Investigating the Perceived Emotional Experience of Bilinguals in the Acquisition of First and Second Languages: KIRKHS Students as a Case Study

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Abstract—When indulging in any piece of literature, one generally experiences the emotions contained in that piece. While this rings true for a reader reading a piece in their first language, users of a second language claim to be less emotional in their second language generally and especially whilst reading literature. This study therefore embarks on investigating the perceived emotional experience of bilinguals when reading poetry in their native language (Malay) and their second language (Arabic). It also investigates whether learning in the form of literary skills and text familiarity plays a key role in experiencing emotion in second language poetry. 60 participants were exposed to 5 poems in their native language and second language respectively. A self-report emotion scale (PANAS) was administered before and after each language exposure. They were then taught the poems. After a week they were once again exposed to the same second language poems and 5 new second language poems. The (PANAS) scale was once again administered before and after. The results show that text familiarity has a significant effect on emotional experience in second language users.

Index Terms—Acquisition, bilingual, emotion, literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotion in the context of multi-lingual speakers has only actively been researched in the past decade. With over half of the world's population being able to communicate in more than one language it is vital that an understanding of the bilingual's sensitivity to emotion is understood, especially in the second language.

Recent studies have explored this topic by using skin conductance measures and self-report (Harris, Aycicegi & Gleason, 2003; Dewaele, 2004; 2006). These studies have investigated differences between L1 and L2 (first and second languages) and in certain instances have found significant variation between them when there is a difference in the age at which L1 and L2 were acquired, the context of acquisition, the level of proficiency and dominance (Harris, et al., 2003; Aycicegi & Harris, 2004; Eilola & Havelka, 2010). Yet at times, even when these factors are taken into consideration, they find a difference, in the instance of childhood reprimands (Aycicegi & Harris, 2004; Caldwell-Harris, Tong, Lung and Poo, 2011). These studies have however

concentrated on emotional arousal in using single words or single sentences with emotional implications to them.

In the context of a literary work or poem, there is an amalgamation of different aspects of the literature which draws the reader into the world of the author and experience the emotion which the author or poet places on paper. This is achieved by authors using different cues, like thoughts utterances and observations to cue the reader to process a piece of literature in a certain way (Oatley & Olsen, 2010). These cues trigger a section of the language layer which starts a simulation in the brain which makes an individual experience the literary piece as real life experience or a dream like experience therefore experiencing the emotion associated with it (Oatley, 1999). These at a first glance may seem to trigger memories of these emotions in long term memory and therefore bring forth the experience of those emotions. The experiencing of emotion in literature could therefore be attributed to acquisition of emotion in the initial context. Bartlett (1932), however demonstrated that mere comprehension and recalling when reading does not account for the emotions experienced but that they are firstly based on idiosyncratic and societal schemas which if found inadequate to furnish the details of the emotional experience will then get these emotional elaborations from memory.

It can therefore be understood that, when dealing with language in a single word context it involved comprehension of emotion in that word only. However when experiencing emotion in a piece of literature or poem it will require the experience surrounding the circumstances which relates to emotional experience in real life, in an internal, interpersonal or intrapersonal context.

With regards to second language, it involves the additional dynamic of these idiosyncratic and societal subtleties being available in the context of a second language. It must be noted that a second language here is understood as a language acquired after puberty as language acquired before then is regarded as a second first language. The second language would therefore initially use emotional information from the first language which may or may not be equivalent to the emotional experience information in the second language (Chomsky, 1965, Sauter, 2002, White, 2000; 2003).

This study therefore embarks on exploring the emotional experience of advance second language users when reading poetry in their first and second languages, initially without the elaborations of the cultural, societal and idiosyncratic differences between the two languages. It is predicted that in this situation the emotional experience in L1 will be significant however without the additional information

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specifically focusing on the emotional subtleties there will be no significant experience in the second language. The second part of this study will recheck the emotional experience in the second language after these subtleties have been pointed out. It is predicted that in this case the emotion in the second language will be experienced at a higher rate and since this learning will contribute to the idiosyncratic and societal schemas for the second language it will be carried over to novel poetry in the second language.

II. METHOD

A. Participants

Sixty participants, 30 women and 30 men, ranging from 19-24 years of age ($M_{age}=20.79$, $SD=1.51$) were recruited from the Kulliyah (Faculty) of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). They were all born and raised in Malaysia, their native language is Malay and none of them resided for any period of time in an Arab country. They all started learning Arabic between the ages of 9 and 11 (M_{age} of acquisition=10.21 years, $SD=.48$) and have been studying it for 8 to 14 years (M_{years} of exposure=10.59 years, $SD=1.54$). The faculty they were recruited from used Arabic as the medium of instruction. Proficiency for Arabic was therefore based on the scores of their entrance test to get into the faculty which required a minimum score of 8 overall which is equivalent to the scoring system of the IELTS in English. Participation was on voluntary bases without any form of reward given.

B. Materials

A demographic questionnaire was formulated requesting gender, age, languages used and which order they were acquired, age of acquisition, location of acquisition and percentage of daily usage and their score on their entrance proficiency test as well as their Arabic for academic purposes course.

Five Malay (L1) love poems, *Cintaku jauh di pulau* by Chairil Anwar, *Mahkota cinta* by Usman Awang, *Ayn* by Kemala, *Senja di pelabuhan* by Siti Zainon Ismail and *Punguk Rindukan Bulan* were used in this study.

Ten Arabic (L2) love poems, *Al Atlal* by Ibrahim Naji, *Wal hub illa* by Ahmad Shawqi, *Taj al jamal* by Basyarah Al Khouri, *Ana Uhibbuki* by Nizar Qabbani, *Qariban* by Ghazi Al Qasibi Al Uyun Al Sud by Iliya Abu Madhi, *Man Anti* by Badr Al Siyab, *Al Qamar Al 'Asyiq* by 'Ali Mahmud Taha, *Uzkuriini* by Ahmad Radhi and *Al Muannasah* by Majnun Layla.

After each poem in both languages five multiple choice comprehension questions were given to test general comprehension across languages.

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) translated to Malay was used to ascertain the emotional effect of the poem. This study was only interested in the positive affect schedule as all the themes of the poems were love and therefore only the results pertaining to the positive scores will be reported.

C. Procedure

All materials were delivered paper based. The demographic questionnaire was administered in the first

meeting with the participants. Each poem was packaged as PANAS, poem, comprehension questions, PANAS. The five Malay poems and first five Arabic poems were delivered one a day alternating between languages from Monday to Friday over a period of two weeks.

The participants then attended an intensive poetry workshop which lasted for a month teaching them the intricacies, details, styles and subtleties entailed in the Arabic poems with the emphasis on generalizing it to Arab society and culture.

A week after the intensive course the participants were re-administered based on the same package (PANAS, poem, comprehension questions, PANAS) the initial five Arabic poems one a day Monday to Friday of the first week and the novel five Arabic poems one a day Monday to Friday on the second week to assess if there were any carry over effects of learning.

III. RESULTS

In terms of the comprehension questions all participants scored the maximum score in the Malay poems exposure, the Arabic initial poems exposure and the Arabic novel poems exposure. This therefore indicates that all participants were equally proficient in their second language and understood the literal concepts in the poems.

Repeated measures analyses was used and yielded significant results where the within subjects effects were $F(1, 59) = 65.41$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = 0.53$. The within subjects contrast were also significant where $F(1, 59) = 22.12$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = 0.27$. All the before positive PANAS before poem scores were averaged and yielded a base average ($M = 30.88$). Pairwise comparison was used to validate the difference between the before exposure PANAS scores and the PANAS scores after the Malay poem exposure ($M = 37.92$, $SE = .33$), initial Arabic poem exposure ($M = 30.77$, $SE = .313$), repeated Arabic poem exposure ($M = 36.92$, $SE = .67$) and the novel Arabic poem exposure ($M = 34.92$, $SE = .67$).

Malay poem exposure was significant ($p = .00$) when compared the base score as was predicted due to it being the first language and emotional information and contexts being readily available for reliving the experience in the simulation or imagination. What also yielded outcome as we predicted was the initial Arabic poem exposure, was not significant when compared to the base ($p = .45$), even though at a comprehension level they scored fully. The repeated Arabic poem exposure as well as the novel poems exposure were both significant ($p = .00$) when compared to base, indicating that the teaching of the subtleties of society, idiosyncrasies and culture in the second language do have an impact on the emotional impact on the individual. These results also indicate that this emotional experience is not task specific or literature specific as it carried over to the novel poems thus supporting the notion of societal schemas and idiosyncrasies playing a role in experiencing.

Interestingly there were no significant differences between the Malay, Arabic repeated and Arabic novel poem exposure, thus indicating that the after learning the emotional experience in second and first languages are equivalent.

IV. DISCUSSION

Our results indicated firstly that individuals experience emotion after reading poetry in their first language and this experience was measurable. It also indicated that initially bilinguals do not experience emotion similarly in their second language. This is most likely due to the requirement of additional information other than language comprehension and usage to experience emotion. This is in line with Oatley's, (1999, 2010) view that a reader has to experience the poem like a simulation basically reliving the emotional experiences from memory and applying it to the present literature. This result is in line with the notion that autobiographical memory, understanding of the social world and future planning formulate a simulation which is experienced as consciousness (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010). Wells-Jopling and Oatley (2012) extend Baumeister and Masicampo's (2010) view of consciousness to fiction literature. It also fits in with Bartlett's, (1932) societal schemas and idiosyncrasies as a means to interpret literature.

These results also indicate that initially there is no transfer of emotional experiences from the first language lexicon to the inter-language or second language lexicon in language acquisition (Clahsen & Muysken 1986).

The results of the repeated exposure indicates that these societal schemas can be modified according to the context of the second language and that second language can be learned and updated contrary to the view of the critical period hypothesis which states that language can only be acquired to a certain age (Gleitman, & Newport, 1995, Hurford, 1991). In addition, evidence contrary to this hypothesis comes from the findings that there was no significant difference between Malay and both the represented Arabic poems as well as the Novel Arabic poems.

It however also indirectly gives support to a weak link between the lexicon and conceptual store for second language emotional which is in line with Kroll and Stewart's, (1994) Revised Hierarchical Model. This study however proves that by teaching the missing information this conceptual link can become stronger and becomes a link for all L2 usage.

The overall results of this study highlight the exciting possibility of tailoring L2 teaching in relation to specific areas of weakness in the L2 user. This will enable the L2 user to acquire global skills. It is a possibility that these skills are available in L1 however learning is what activates it in the L2 context. This seems especially useful where emotional and figurative information in the second language needs to be acquired.

In another light it could also mean that for the initial acquisition of language, phonology, morphology and syntax, basic cognitive abilities are used. With relation to literature especially where emotional experiences are concerned, higher cognitive functions have to be engaged for it to be activated in L2.

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