Acculturation Model for L2 Acquisition: Review and Evaluation

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Abstract - In the last decade, research on second language acquisition (SLA) expanded enormously. The research literature abounds in approaches, theories, models, laws, and principles. It should be mentioned that theorizing in SLA should follow extensive and rigorous empirical research. Irrespective of these methodological issues, SLA research has gone ahead and spawned a plethora of theories. Ritchie & Bhatia (1996) assert that as empirical results on SLA became increasingly available in the 1970s, several general models of SLA were proposed with the purpose of integrating these results. Ellis (1985) identified seven key areas of SLA research: the acculturation model, accommodation theory, discourse theory, the monitor model, the variable competence model, the universal hypothesis, and neurofunctional theory (p.248). Though the assumptions underlying each model may be well motivated, none of the proponents, as yet, has suggested systematic methodologies to investigate the validity of the statements evolved from these models. This paper is an attempt to review, evaluate, and critique the validity of acculturation model. The procedures will be to: (a) briefly summarize the model (b) examine the validity of the statements evolving from this theory, (c) review empirical evidence reported on in favor or against this theory, and (d) discuss the practical implication of this model in SLA.

Keywords – Acculturation Model, Second Language Acquisition, Acculturation Model's Validity

1. Introduction

McLaughlin (1987) & Daniels (2000) acknowledge that acculturation theory originated with the ethnographic work of Linton (1960, as cited in Daniels 2000, p.1), who studied the changes Native Americans needed to make in order to become more integrated into mainstream American society. He identified the notion of the distance separating the two cultural groups and the social and psychological changes which would be necessary for closer integration to take place. Social distance would be associated with the actual contact which was available between the two cultures, while psychological distance represented the extent to which the learner wanted to become closely adapted to the dominant culture.

Perhaps the earliest model toward centrality to learner factors was Schumann's acculturation/pidginization model (1978). Gass and Selinker (2008) assert that the model developed from Schumann's observation of the untutored acquisition of English by Alberto, a 33-year-old, working class Costa Rican living in the Boston area. Alberto lived in a Portuguese-speaking neighborhood and worked in a factory staffed by NNSs of English. Due to his limited contact with English speakers, it is not surprising that Alberto was not a very successful language learner. Schumann explained Alberto's limited acquisition of English by pointing to Alberto's social and psychological distance from speakers of the TL.

2. The Acculturation Concept

The acculturation concept started to be used by American social anthropologists towards the end of the 19th century. Its wide application to the study of social changes and cultural contacts between different communities prompted the magazine American Anthropologist to publish a memorandum on the study of acculturation in the 1930s (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, cited in Ward, et. al., 2009).

One of the earliest definitions of acculturation as a process came precisely from (Redfield, et. al., 1936, P. 149 cited in Navas, et. al., 2005), for whom acculturation comprises ''those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups''. Acculturation is a dual process affecting the members of two or more cultural groups as each adapts to the presence of the other (Berry, 1997). Castro (2003, cited in Ward et. al., 2009) believes that the concept is distinct

from *enculturation,* which refers to the learning of a culture's values, beliefs and norms during development, and also from *cultural change,* which are changes in a culture resulting from innovation, invention and discovery.

A parallel conceptualization has been developed, mainly among French-language scholars: interculturation. The concept is defined (Clanet. 1990, p.70; cited in Berry, 1997) as "the set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when they identify themselves as culturally distinct". There are evident similarities between the acculturation and interculturation approaches, and it is often difficult in practice to distinguish the research done, or the conclusions drawn from the two approaches. One distinguishing feature, however, is the interest in the formation of new cultures in the interculturation, more than in the acculturation, approach. Given these rather broad similarities, this article will employ the term acculturation to refer to the general processes and outcomes (both cultural and psychological) of intercultural contact.

3. The Acculturation Model

The acculturation model, developed by Schumann, is based on social and psychological factors. "Acculturation" is defined as the social and psychological taxonomy of factors which are believed to be important in the process of SLA in natural contexts. The major claim of the model is that acculturation, which is a cluster of social-psychological factors, is the major cause of SLA (Schumann, 1978, 1990). Schumann states that any leaner can be placed along a continuum ranging from social-psychological distance to social-psychological proximity with the speakers of the target language. The degree of language acquisition, then, would correlate with the degree of the learner's proximity to the target group.

Schumann (1986) claims that acculturation, or the integration of the L2 learner into the target linguistic community is not a direct cause of second language acquisition (SLA), but rather it is the first in a chain of factors which results in natural SLA. Schumann (1986, p. 385) proposes that "acculturation as a remote cause brings the learner into contact with TL-speakers and verbal interaction with those speakers as a proximate cause brings about the negotiation of appropriate input which then operates as the immediate cause of language acquisition".

According to Schumann (1978), social distance refers to the learner as a member of a social group that is in contact with another social group whose members speak a different language. He enlists various factors that shorten the social distance:

Social dominance: If the second-language learning (2LL) group is politically, culturally, technically or economically dominant to or subordinate to the target language (TL) group, social contact between the two

groups will tend not to be sufficient for optimal target language acquisition. If they are nearly equal in status, then there will be more contact between the two groups and thus, acquisition of the target language will be enhanced.

Assimilation, preservation, and adaptation: The best condition for L2 acquisition is obtained when the 2LL group wants to assimilate into the TL group. The second best condition occurs when the 2LL group wants to adapt to the TL culture for intergroup interaction without assimilating to it. The least favorable conditions obtain for acquiring the L2 when the 2LL group wishes to remain separated linguistically and culturally from the TL group.

Enclosure: The more the 2LL groups share social institutions such as schools, churches, workplaces, clubs, and others with the TL group, the more favorable the conditions will be for L2 acquisition.

Cohesiveness and size: The smaller and less cohesive the 2LL group, the more likely the contact with the TL group and the more favorable the conditions for L2 acquisition.

Congruence: The more similar the culture of the two groups, the more likely there will be social contact and thus language acquisition.

Attitude: The more positive the views of the 2LL group toward the TL group, the more favorable will be the conditions for L2.

Intended length of residence: The longer L2 learners plan to remain in the L2 environment, the more likely it is that they will feel the necessity of learning the TL.

The psychological factors, mainly affective in nature, are secondary important. To him, the following factors affect the psychological distance:

- *Language shock* (Learner's confusion when using L2)
- *Culture shock* (learners' disorientation as a result of culture differences).

3.1 Acculturation: Types, Stages and Kinds of Learning

Trawinski (2005) cites social and psychological distances determine how much input the learner will be exposed to, and how much input will be converted in to intake. Schumann (1978) believes that the level of language proficiency the learner achieves strictly depend on the degree of acculturation. He distinguishes there functions of language, which may also be considered as the three stages of language development:

- Communicative function (the transmission of referential information only)
- Integrative function (the mark a membership of a particular social group)

- Expressive function (the display of linguistic virtuosity).

The acculturation model developed by Schumann (1978) emphasizes identification with a community as a primary requirement of SLA. According to Schumann, there are two types of acculturation. The first type of acculturation takes place when the learner is socially integrated with and psychologically opens to the target group. The second type of acculturation has all the characteristics of the first type except for the psychological openness of the learner. Brown (1980) postulates the process of acculturation in the target language natural environment consists of four stages:

- **Euphoria-** the learners get excited over the newness of the surroundings
- **Culture shock-** emerges as individuals feel the intrusion of more and more culture differences into their own images of self and security
- **Cultural stress-** gradual recovery: some problems of acculturation are solved, while others continue for some time. The learner starts to understand the differences in thinking. The learner's problems center around the question of identity, she/he does not perceive himself/herself as belonging to any culture.
- **Full recovery-** adaptation, assimilation or acceptance of the new culture. A new identity developed.

Schuman (1978) also describes the kind of learning which take place in this model. He suggests that the early stages of SLA are characterized by the same processes that are responsible for the formation of pidgin languages. If the social and/or psychological distance is great then acculturation is impeded and the learner does not progress beyond the early stages of language acquisition. As a result his/her target language will stay pidginize. Pidginization is characterized by simplifications and reductions occurring in the learner's interlanguage which lead to fossilization when the learner's interlanguage system does not progress in the direction of the target language (Gitsaki, 1998).

4. Evidence Supports the Acculturation Model

Schumann (1978) provides some supporting evidence from different studies that these variables enhance or inhibit SLA. He also postulates that psychological factors, especially motivation, may have more influence on SLA than social factors (Stauble, 1977). It is interesting to note that according to this model, variables other than acculturation are of minor or moderate importance for SLA. For example, instruction is assumed to have no important role in SLA. In this regard, Schumann (1978, p.368) states: "… educational institutions are really only free to manipulate teacher, method, and text variables. I believe that these variables are so weak in terms of the total language learning situation that no matter how much we attempt to change

them, we will never achieve much more success than we are achieving now".

Norton Pierce (1995) highlights the strength of Schumann's model in the socio-cultural context of language learning without neglecting the role of individuals in the language learning process. It recognizes, furthermore, the importance that must be placed on regular contact between language learners and speakers of the target language for successful language learning to take place.

Moreover, Doughty and Long (2003) postulate that Schumann's model applies to L2 acquisition in the natural settings only. They maintain that, in FL learning, the situation is quite different because most social and affective variables lose their importance in conscious learning. Consequently, the Acculturation Model cannot be used directly for purposes of working out a methodology for FL instruction

Finally, according to Schumann (1986), acculturation is a dynamic process that takes place over time. A learner's social and psychological distance profile may change during the course of his or her stay in the TL environment.

5. Acculturation Extended Model (AEM)

It should be noted that the acculturation model focuses on social and psychological factors and ignore other variables in SLA. That is why some scholar added other variables to account for SLA along with acculturation factor. Ellis (2008) and Larson-Freeman (2007) assert that an elaborated version of Schumann' model was provided by Anderson as cognitive dimension. Anderson built the nativization model on Schumann model in particular by providing a cognitive dimension which Schumann did not consider. According to Ellis (1985) the model consists of two major processes:

- **Nativization:** The process of assimilation of the input. The learner modifies the L2 input to match his/ her internalized knowledge of L1, other languages and the world. This process is visible in the first stage of language acquisition.

- **Denativisation:** The process of accommodation. The learner modifies his/her internalized knowledge to accommodate L2 input. This process is typical for later stages of language acquisition when L2 production is close to target norm.

Teske and Nelson (1974, cited in Navas, et.al. 2005) offered the first complete psychological perspective on acculturation. According to these writers, acculturation included changes in material traits, behavior patterns, norms, institutional changes, and importantly, values. However, Teske and Nelson did not go further in their psychological analysis of how members of diverse cultures accommodate to one another.

This was left to Berry (et. al., 1992), who expanded on the view of acculturation to include varieties of adaptation and specifically identified the following four factors: assimilation, integration, rejection, and deculturation. The importance of Berry's model was that it recognized the importance of multicultural societies, minority individuals and groups, and the fact that individuals have a choice in the matter of how far they are willing to go in the acculturation process. Today, there are numerous instances of ethnic groups who have managed to revive their ancestral language and culture (Fishman, 2001, as cited in Padilla& Perez, 2003). Thus, acculturation was not seen as a strictly unidimensional process of cultural change but as a process forced by intergroup contact with multiple outcomes.

6. Factors Existing Prior to and Arising during Acculturation

Individuals begin the acculturation process with a number of personal characteristics of both a demographic and social nature. In particular one's age has a known relationship to the way acculturation will proceed. When acculturation starts early (e.g. prior to entry into primary school), the process is generally smooth (Beiser et al., 1988, as cited in Berry, 1997).

However, Berry (1997) postulates that older youth do often experience substantial problems particularly during adolescence. It is possible that conflict between demands of parents and peers are maximal at this period, or that the problems of life transitions between childhood and adulthood are compounded by cultural transitions.

Moreover, gender has variable influence on the acculturation process. There is substantial evidence that females may be more at risk for problems than males (e.g. Beiser et al., as cited in Berry, 1997). However, this generalization probably itself depends on the relative status and differential treatment of females in the two cultures.

In addition to what cited above, Berry (1997) discussed factors may arise during acculturation. To Berry, acculturation strategies have been shown to have substantial relationships with positive adaptation: integration is usually the most successful; marginalization is the least; and assimilation and separation strategies are intermediate. This pattern has been found in virtually every study, and is present for all types of acculturating groups. Why this should be so, however, is not clear. In on interpretation, integration strategy incorporates many of the other protective factors: a willingness for mutual accommodation ; involvement in two cultural ; and being flexible in personality. In sharp contrast, marginalization involves rejection by the dominant society, combined with own-culture loss; this means the presence of hostility and much reduced social support. Assimilation involves own culture shedding, and separation involves rejection of the dominant culture.

7. Pedagogical Implications

Kubota (1999) cites the importance of teaching culture in acculturation model. He believes that the acculturation model promotes the explicit teaching of the conventions of the target discourse community to ESL students in order to overcome cultural differences. Pedagogical recommendations include a discipline-oriented approach to L2 academic writing and a cognitive apprenticeship approach , in which the conventions of the target academic discourse community are explicitly taught to ESL students. The acculturation model takes for granted cultural differences and exploits them as a justification for the specific pedagogical needs of ESL students, while resisting mainstream assumptions about audience, voice, and critical thinking for teaching ESL.

In line with Kubota, Buttaro (2004) concluded that understanding the English language needs of learners requires more than merely assessing students' abilities in reading and writing; it also requires understanding the social and cultural factors that are at play in the students' lives, and developing curricula that address these realities. Buttaro noted that the curricula of ESL classes often reflect idealized American middle-class values and economic situations rather than the economic and social realities of the students. Similarly, Gordon (2004) described the disconnect between the ESL textbooks she studied and the realities of students' lives; the textbooks concentrated on vocabulary for the workplace (where the students did not need to use English), but did not address English as used in the legal system, which was a pressing concern for the families in her study. Menard-Warwick (2005) agreed, stating that educators need to understand the social and personal forces that create dilemmas for students and address them directly by making them topics for discussion in class, allowing the students to use the target language to derive a collective solution based on the resources that each student brings to the class. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) encouraged teachers to learn as much as they can about their students' identities outside the classroom, and draw on those identities in classroom activities to encourage the students to continue their investment in learning.

8. Critical Look at Acculturation Model

In spite of being widely referred to in the literature, the acculturation model has received limited support in empirical study. Saville-Troike (2006) argued that the model is problematic in that the concept of acculturation and what it entails is too complex to be operationally defined in experimentally tested. Farhady (1981) believes that the acculturation model takes into account the most important factors which may be involved in SLA. This model is appealing because it attempts to explain the potential "whys" of SLA. However, there remain some unanswered questions with the model. Schumann (1968) states that the model only accounts for language learning under conditions of immigration. He also cautions the

reader about variables other than acculturation which may influence SLA.

Farhady (1981) considers the second problem of the model as it deliberately excludes other potentially important variables (such as cognitive and instructional factors) in SLA. Of course, detailed investigation is necessary to determine these variables, their interrelationship with one another, and their correlation with and contribution to SLA.

Ellis (1994) believes that Schumann's theory received limited empirical support. Among some of the criticisms that the acculturation theory received was that social factors are assumed to have a direct impact on second language acquisition while they are more likely to have an indirect one (Ellis, 1994, P. 233). Also, pidginization is a group phenomenon, while language acquisition is an individual phenomenon. Finally, the acculturation model fails to explain how the social factors influence the quality of contact the learners' experience.

9. Concluding Remarks

Obviously, the main goal of SLA research, either short term or long term, is to somehow account for the very complex nature of SLA. That is, the goal of the theories is (or should be) to explain the interlanguage system of the learners in a scientific way. In respect to this model, Farhady (1981) believes that the acculturation model attempts to answer questions dealing with the "whys" of SLA. He continues that if we want to claim that SLA is a social science, we should comply with the principles of established social sciences. Stern (1983, p. 518) believes this model has given a "better insight into language learning, designing research studies, and diagnoses individual patterns of language learning".

It can be inferred that the acculturation model takes into account the most important factors which may be involved in SLA since it draws the learners' social and psychological factors. But, based on our experience in teaching English, the problem is the application of these factors in EFL classroom. First, the teacher may lack how to teach culture or may not have adequate knowledge to teach. Second, informing these factors to the students demand more naturalistic context than in a classroom environment.

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