

Enhancement of Cross-Linguistic Effect with the Increase in the Multilingual Proficiency during Early Childhood: A Case Study of English Language Acquisition by a Pre-School Child

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Abstract : The paper is a study on the inevitable cross-linguistic effect found in the early multilingual learners. The cross-linguistic behaviour like code-mixing, code-switching, foreign accent, literal translation, redundancy and syntactic manipulation effected due to other languages on the English language output of a non-native pre-school child are discussed here. A case study method is adopted in this paper to support the claim of the title. A simultaneously tetra lingual pre-school child's (within 1;3 to 4;0) language behaviour is analysed here. The sample output data of the child is gathered from the diary entries maintained by her family, regular observations and video recordings done since her birth. She is getting the input of her mother tongue, Sambalpuri, from her grandparents only; Hindi, the local language from her play-school and the neighbourhood; English only from her mother and occasional visit of other family friends; Odia only during the reading of the Odia story book. The child is exposed to code-mixing of all the languages throughout her childhood. But code-mixing, literal translation, redundancy and duplication were absent in her initial stage of multilingual acquisition. As the child was more proficient in English in comparison to her other first languages and had never heard code-mixing in English language; it was expected from her input pattern of English (one parent, English language) that she would maintain purity in her use of English while talking to the English language interlocutor. But with gradual increase in the language proficiency in each of the languages of the child, her handling of the multiple codes becomes deft cross-linguistically. It can be deduced from the case study that after attaining certain milestone proficiency in each language, the child's linguistic faculty can operate at a metalinguistic level. The functional use of each morpheme, their arrangement in words and in the sentences, the supra segmental features, lexical-semantic mapping, culture specific use of a language and the pragmatic skills converge to give a typical childlike multilingual output in an intelligible manner to the multilingual people (with the same set of languages in combination). The result is appealing because for expressing the same ideas which the child used to speak (may be with grammatically wrong expressions) in one language, gradually, she starts showing cross-linguistic effect in her expressions. So the paper pleads for the separatist view from the very beginning of the holophrastic phase (as the child expresses in addressee-specific language); but development of a metalinguistic ability that helps the child in communicating in a sophisticated way according to the linguistic status of the addressee is unique to the multilingual child. This metalinguistic ability is independent of the mode of input of a multilingual child.

Keywords : code-mixing, cross-linguistic effect, early multilingualism, literal translation

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