

Investigating the Acquisition of English Emotion Terms by Moroccan EFL Learners

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Abstract : Culture influences lexicalization of salient concepts in a society. Hence, languages often have different degrees of equivalence regarding lexical items of different fields. The present study focuses on the field of emotions in English and Moroccan Arabic. Findings of a comparative study that involved fifty English emotions revealed that Moroccan Arabic has equivalence of some English emotion terms, partial equivalence of some emotion terms, and no equivalence for some other terms. It is hypothesized then that emotion terms that have near equivalence in Moroccan Arabic will be easier to acquire for EFL learners, while partially equivalent terms will be difficult to acquire, and those that have no equivalence will be even more difficult to acquire. In order to test these hypotheses, the participants (104 advanced Moroccan EFL learners and 104 native speakers of English) were given two tests: the first is a receptive one in which the participants were asked to choose, among four emotion terms, the term that is appropriate to fill in the blanks for a given situation indicating certain kind of feelings. The second test is a productive one in which the participants were asked to give the emotion term that best described the feelings of the people in the situations given. The results showed that conceptually equivalent terms do not pose any problems for Moroccan EFL learners since they can link the concept to an already existing linguistic category; whereas the results concerning the acquisition of partially equivalent terms indicated that this type of emotion terms were difficult for Moroccan EFL learners to acquire, because they need to restructure the boundaries of the target linguistic categories by expanding them when the term includes other range of meanings that are not subsumed in the L1 term. Surprisingly however, the results concerning the case of non-equivalence revealed that Moroccan EFL learners could internalize the target L2 concepts that have no equivalence in their L1. Thus, it is the category of emotion terms that have partial equivalence in the learners' L1 that pose problems for them.

Keywords : acquisition, culture, emotion terms, lexical equivalence

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