



## International Journal of Asian Social Science

journal homepage: <http://www.aessweb.com/journal-detail.php?id=5007>



## SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON FOSSILIZATION OF INTERLANGUAGE

**Hulin Ren**

*Associate Professor, Department of English, North China Electric Power University, Beijing China*

### ABSTRACT

*The paper is to investigate the role of social factors that influence the fossilization of learners' interlanguage. In this context, "fossilization" refers to the stopping in the acquisition of a second language (L2) short of native-like proficiency (Towell and Hawkins, 1994). The paper begins with Wolfson's (1989) overview of social settings that influence the fossilization of learners' interlanguage and Ellis (2005) discussion of the impact of social factors on L2 proficiency evidenced with a local example by Wright (1996). Next, Schumann (1986) Acculturation Model for the contribution of social factors to the fossilization of interlanguage is presented and critically evaluated. Following this, the distinction between indigenized varieties of a language and fossilized interlanguage is clearly defined and compared. Finally, a number of conclusions are drawn with regard to the way and effect of social factors on fossilization in L2 acquisition.*

**Keywords:** Fossilization, Acculturation model, Indigenized varieties

### INTRODUCTION

Social settings such as wars and famines or other natural disasters occur in human society which causes movements of peoples from one area to another, and consequently linguistically different populations come into contact with one another that can lead to situations in which L2 acquisition, Conquest, migration and colonization which are followed by the imposition of languages not native to the occupied area, together with the development of science and technology have also added the opportunity of L2 acquisition. Wolfson (1989) takes that social factors such as exploration and conquest, trade and slavery, colonization and nationalism influence the fossilization of learners' interlanguage.

The direct influence of four social factors on fossilization of L2 proficiency is proposed by Ellis (2005), that is, age, sex, social class and ethnic identity. Social age group learners who commence learning an L2 after the onset of puberty are unlikely to acquire a native-speaker accent, while those who begin after the age of about 15 years are less likely to develop as much grammatical ability as those who begin before. Women might be better at L2 learning than men; they are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms in the L2 input and they will be more likely to rid themselves of the interlanguage forms that deviate from target-language form. There is a relationship between social class and L2 achievement, children from middle-class homes regularly outperformed those from lower and working-class homes in L2 acquisition and achieve higher levels of L2 proficiency. Ethnic identity can exert a profound influence on L2 learning, and learners who are close to the target-language culture are likely to outperform those who are more distant. A social-structural view of the relationship between attitudes and L2 learning holds that learners with

positive attitudes towards their own ethnic identity and towards the target culture can be expected to develop a strong motivation and high levels of L2 proficiency.

Wright (1996) offers a local example of the social factors affecting fossilization of English in South Africa. Greatly influenced by the impact of apartheid, especially the Bantu Education Act of 1953, generations of the black South Africans have been forced to learn English from each other in situations which offered limited occasion for its use and little contact with native-speaker norms. Thus, black South African English is under the condition of deviating from standard English, according to Charles Nwaila (1993) report on the consequences in the South Africa classroom, the students even with attractive English symbols come into contact with English mother-tongue speakers as lectures for the first time when they go to universities or tertiary institutions, they can not understand the lectures or be understood by the mother-tongue speakers.

### Acculturation Model

Schumann's Acculturation Model gives an answer to the way and effect of social factors on fossilization of L2 acquisition from the social and affective variables. Schumann (1978) Acculturation Model claims that L2 acquisition is a process of acculturation that is clustered with social and affective variables; the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language will control the degree to which he acquires the L2.

According to Schumann (1986) social factors that contribute to fossilization of L2 acquisition are dominance, integration, enclosure and other factors. Dominance refers to the social position of a group of L2 users that may either dominate a native group, be dominated by another group or be on an equal footing with them. Integration is that an L2 group may decide to assimilate and give up its own life-style, to acculturate and maintain its own culture at the same time, or to preserve its own culture and reject the other. Enclosure is an L2 group decides to have high enclosure, in which it remains separate from the other, or to have low enclosure, in which it mixes with the other group. Other factors are cohesiveness and size of the group, congruence or similarity between the two cultures, attitudes of the two groups to each other, and the intended length of residence of the learners in the country.

The Acculturation Model intends to give a general account of success and failure in L2 learning from the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target-language. One example is the interlanguage property of Alberto and Wes. Alberto's and Wes's interlanguage is problematic in syntactic structures. Alberto never progressed to the Aux-Neg rule. He inverted subject and auxiliary in questions only 5 percent of the time and his inversion questions were also restricted to certain verbs— *say* and *like* as in *what did you say to me*. He omitted most auxiliaries, such as the range of *do* forms, and verbal and possessive inflections, such as regular past tense and progressive *ing* and possessive *-s*. For Wes number errors of the English copular are limited to an occasional substitution of *they* as for *they are*, for most verbs Wes used either the bare stem consistently or the *ing* form consistently. When Wes used a progressive form, he produced a great number of other utterances of *be*, with a great variety of meanings where there was no reason to use auxiliary *be*.

According to Acculturation Theory, Alberto's and Wes's interlanguage should have the above-mentioned properties. Alberto and Wes were politically, culturally, technically and economically subordinate to the target-English group, their integration pattern typically lay between preservation of cultural identity and assimilation into the target-language culture. They were members of a group with relatively high enclosure. So their L2 English learning took place without instruction and there was no effective contact with native-English group, their fossilization was attributed to their limited degree to get acculturated to the target-English group.

In spite of its usefulness the Model is not without problem. Firstly, the Model does not build on the solid empirical findings, that is to say, the data from Alberto and Wes were presented chiefly as

percentage rather than figures. Secondly, other factors such as age and cognitive level except social and psychological distance could be alternative explanations of Alberto's and Wes's failure in L2 acquisition. Thirdly, by the Model L2 acquisition is a spin-off from the process of acculturation rather than an independent process, which is obviously deviant with general L2 acquisition theory.

### **Indigenized Varieties and Fossilized Interlanguage**

It is generally accepted that indigenized varieties of a language and fossilization interlanguage have their clear distinction. They differ in the target, input, motivation, process and the role of first language. Indigenized varieties of a language are non-native institutionalized varieties of a language that are functionally the dominant varieties for a large number of speakers in a social setting (Sridher:162). Fossilized interlanguage is the acquisition of an L2 that is short of native-like proficiency (Towell and Hawkins, 1994).

The exact differences between indigenized varieties and fossilized interlanguage can be seen from five aspects, that is, the target, input, motivation, process and the role of first language. The target of indigenized varieties of a language is to acquire primarily for use with other speakers of indigenized varieties of the same language, whereas the goal of interlanguage is to acquire native-like competence in the target language (Wolfson, 2007). The input to indigenized variety learners is the restricted indigenous variety of a language, while the input available to interlanguage learners is the native varieties of the target language. Learners of the indigenous variety of a language are motivated to communicate with other speakers of the interlanguage varieties, or to its being taught at school, while the motivation for interlanguage learner is the admiration for the native speakers of the language and a desire to become a member of their culture (Tapiwa and Jonathan, 2013). The process of the indigenous variety of a language is to study the functions that the L2 is expected to perform for the learners and the learner's community, whereas the process of interlanguage is to interact with a native-variety of the target language during the acquisition period. The learner's first language contributes to the communicative function in indigenized varieties, while in the interlanguage acquisition first language is interfering with the structure of the target language.

### **CONCLUSION**

In summary, social factors can provide settings of L2 acquisition, and thus can influence fossilization of learners' L2 acquisition. Social factors variables such as age, sex, social class, ethnic identity gender have a direct effect on the attitudes, motivation and proficiency of L2. The usefulness of Schumann's Acculturation Model lies in that it claims that L2 acquisition is taken as a process of becoming adapted to the target language, and therefore the social and affective variables should be taken into consideration, however, as a model of L2 acquisition, it has problems on a variety of formal, conceptual and empirical grounds and so on. Indigenized varieties and fossilized interlanguage differ in that they have different acquisition target, input, motivation and process, as well as the role of first language in L2 acquisition.

### **REFERENCES**

- Charles Nwaila, 1993. A report of english education in south africa. South africa governemnt, . South Africa: Cape Town.
- Ellis, R., 2005. The study of second language acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schumann, J., 1978. The acculturation model for second language acquisition. Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching. Center for Applied Linguistics.

- Schumann, J.H., 1986. Research on the acculturation model for second language acquisition. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural development*, 7: 378-392.
- Tapiwa, M. and M. Jonathan, 2013. An assessment of the effects of local cultures on sports participation by disabled pupils in masvingo urban primary schools in zimbabwe. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 3(2): 310-385.
- Towell, R. and Hawkins, 1994. *Approaches to second language acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Wolfson, N., 2007. *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and tesol*. Cambridge: Newbury House.
- Wright, L., 1996. *The standardisation question in black south african english*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.