

Foreign language learning strategies of three Indonesian multilinguals: A narrative inquiry study

Rizdika Mardiana¹

¹Master Program of English Language Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta
Jalan Rawamangun Muka, Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Foreign language learners usually learn a foreign language using their first language. There have been limited reports on study discussing the ability of foreign language learners to learn a foreign language using their learned foreign language. This study employed an autobiographical narrative inquiry based on the experience of three multilinguals. This study aimed to find out their strategies in learning foreign languages and the factors affecting learning foreign languages. This study found that there were two Indonesian multilinguals that learn Japanese using their limited ability in English. The other multilingual learn English at school and learned Dutch at a language course. The results proved that there are factors such as learner characteristics, linguistic factors, learning processes, age and acquisition, instructional variables, context, purpose, motivation, attention, attitude, study habit, self-concept, and student aptitude affecting learners in learning foreign languages. This study gives little contribution to our understanding of the strategies that might be applied by a foreign language learner to learn a new foreign language.

Keywords: Indonesian multilinguals, foreign language, language learning, multilinguals

INTRODUCTION

A language is needed by people to communicate what they feel, think, and believe to each other whenever they want in a society. They start to acquire a language since baby by communicating simple thing with their mother and other family members as the model of that language. This interaction enables them to have many vocabularies as the beginning step of their language experience. The input will be increased every day as many interactions as they have with the members. The child may soon be proficient in that language if all family members support him by giving as many inputs as they can. Therefore, society is very important for a new language learner to master the language as soon as possible. Society has a role as a media to practice the language as an effort to increase their language ability (Baker, 2001; Hammers & Blanc, 2004).

A family may move from place to place because of parents' job, education, or business. This may encounter problems for children to change their language and learn a language that is used by the new society. They can still use the same language when they want to contact with their families. On the other hand, they also need to learn the new language to be able to communicate with their friends at school. They need to be supported by the society where they learn the new language (Baker, 2001; Hammers & Blanc, 2004). This

society can be a monolingual, bilingual, or even multilingual started from small scope (family, class, school, community) to the biggest scope (a nation).

Furthermore, Stockwell (2007, p. 11) stated that the ability to speak more than one language is more common in the world than being monolingualism. This ability is nowadays required more automatically from people in their productive age. The number of cases when at least a working knowledge of more than one foreign language is required is constantly increasing (Tauchmanova, 2016). Learning foreign language needs a process which is a life-long way and really challenging. Moreover, learning more foreign language is then obviously more challenging. When a foreign language learner is an autonomous learner, they can make their learning process easier because they know their best way and learning strategy as well as the time that is suitable for them to learn the foreign language. Therefore, this study analyzed how respondents learn foreign language using a learned foreign language and the factors that affected them to choose using such learning foreign language strategies. Analyzing the respondents' strategies in learning foreign languages is interesting to investigate to get better understanding of how foreign languages might be learned and to inspire other foreign language learners to try the strategies. It can also be a basic knowledge of how a foreign language is learned.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning

Theory of language learning has been reviewed and used in many studies since Plato stated that language is innate. Language is not learned consciously by human being. There were some movements of this theory proposed by some scholars after Plato. In addition, Descartes and Chomsky through Cartesian movement believe that there were universal principles behind every language. However, Locke philosophy through concept of *tabula rasa* rejecting the idea that there was innate logic behind language. All knowledge come from outside ourselves through sensory experience rather than through innate knowledge that we have at birth. Although this theory is not practical, but it gives important implications. If Plato and the Cartesians are right, then the emphasis in language learning must lie on what we already know using our innate abilities in order to understand any particularity of the specific language. If Locke is right, then language learning should be focused on our sensory input, obtaining as much external input as possible (Lightbrown & Spada, 2003; Brown, 2007).

Skinner proposed theory of behaviorism which stated that language learning grew out of a process of reinforcement and punishment. This means that we need feedback to succeed as language learners, which cannot always be given by our interlocutor. Then Chomsky proposed a theory called universal grammar as universal elements which structure all languages. However, this theory only offers little help for learning second language other than provide the learners with the confidence that the grammar of all languages is already inside the learners' head. Next, Schuman came with a theory which focuses on social and psychological aspects that influence our success in learning second language. The point of this theory is when learners want to master a language they must contact the culture of that language. The more the learners contact with the culture, the faster and easier it will be for

them to learn that language. Finally, Krashen's theory model is the most cited theory in second language acquisition. It is said that language acquisition is subconscious and results from informal and natural communication. Language learning is conscious and driven by error correction. Grammar structures are required in a predictable order. Language acquisition occurs with comprehensible input and it should be monitored to correct your language performance and pressure one to communicate correctly and not just convey meaning (Lightbrown & Spada, 2003; Brown, 2007).

In bilingualism, a person can come or go away from bilingualism and can shift totally from one language to the other, but will never depart from a necessary level of communicative competence needed by the environment. A person who shifts totally from one language to the other means he forgets the language totally and starts to acquire the other. A person who is located in transitional periods of language learning or restructuring will depart from a necessary level of communicative competence needed by the environment (Grosjean, 2008). This situation occurs because bilinguals, also monolinguals, have an innate capacity for language and are communicators.

Foreign Language Learning

There are some differences between language learning of the first language and language learning of foreign language as the second, third, or fourth language. Comparing to first language learning, second language or foreign language learning is easier because the learner has been familiar with the process of acquiring a language. The learner already knows acquired patterns existing in the mother tongue which can be transferred into the process of acquiring a new language. The first language is acquired naturally and the process of acquisition is linked with any normal human being's mental. Foreign languages are learned in artificial conditions and the process of acquisition is different from the one of the mother tongue in real communicative situations (Tauchmanova, 2016).

A study in foreign language learning has been unveiled the learners' experiences in coping their anxiety in learning a foreign language (He, 2018). Most learners experienced a lot of anxiety in their English learning and their English learning was greatly influenced by their teachers in many ways, especially their teachers' sense of responsibility. However, some students did not think that their English learning was much influenced by their teachers. The teacher admitted that some students are good at oral English since they had private English tutors or attended some after-class training programs in their earlier stages of English learning. The other teacher stated that some students are good at English because of their learning environment which encourages English using especially speaking. Some students admitted that a good or bad English teacher made quite different influence to them especially at the beginning stage of their English learning.

In general, there are six factors that influence foreign language learning, namely motivation, attention, attitude, study habit, self-concept, and student aptitude (Halim, 2019). There are two kinds of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is motivation coming from individual needs that want to be satisfy. Extrinsic motivation is motivation coming from the outer side of an individual related to goals to be achieve (Hudson, 2010). The other factor influence students in learning a foreign language is attitude that determines how the

individual make reaction to the situation and what the individual looks for in life. Attitude is the dimensionless internal affective symptoms in the form of a tendency to react or respond in a way that is relatively fixed to the object of people, goods, either positively or negatively (Syah, 2013). Study habit is defined in Halim (2019) as an acquired way of acting which is persistent, uniform and fairly automatic. Furthermore, Bull (2011) stated that habit is a thing that you do very often and almost without thinking. Self-concept described in Halim (2019) is one's view of himself regarding what he knew and felt about his behavior, thought, and feeling and how these affect the behavior of others. Aptitude can be described as one of man's ability to perform an activity and have around since man was there. it is a condition or set of characteristics regard as symptomatic of an individual's ability to acquire with training some knowledge, skill, or set of responses (Halim, 2019).

On the other hand, Brown (2007) stated that there are some factors which should be considered by language teachers to find a suitable teaching method in teaching their students. The factors are learner characteristics, linguistic factors, learning processes, age and acquisition, instructional variables, context, and purpose. The implied message delivered by Brown is students have their own strategies in learning a language and teacher should identify the strategies in order to make the teaching process easier. In terms of autonomous learning, the learners itself need to identify their own strategies by understanding their personalities.

METHODOLOGY

Population and sample of the study

The population of this study was a population in Bogor where many multilingual societies live in. Since this study was a mini research, there were only two samples from two different multilingual societies which were examined. The two participants had a rare experience in learning a foreign language. The demographic background information was obtained to support the main data. These supporting data were about the respondents' gender, age, job, cultural background of parents and spouse, also their educational level.

The first respondent (R1) was a female, an English lecturer, aged 64 years old, and has good proficiency of English, Indonesian and Javanese, and really concerns on language. She is considered as a linguist and a multilingual. She also had an experience in learning Dutch. She lived in Florida for 3 years. The second respondent (R2) was a male, a Biology lecturer, aged 39 years old, and has good proficiency of English, Indonesian, and Japanese. He can understand Sumatran language, but he cannot speak in that language. The third respondent was a female (R3), the wife of the Biology lecturer, aged 38 years old, and has good proficiency of Indonesian, Javanese, English and Japanese. This couple lived in Japan for 6 years.

Research design of the study

The research design employed in this study was an autobiographical narrative inquiry to share respondents' stories in reflecting their strategies in learning foreign languages. By using narrative inquiry, the researcher capture respondents' experience in learning two

foreign languages. This method is a qualitative research method that focusses on deep understanding of individual experiences through narrative stories (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). In the context of this study, the selected method is used to gain a rich and comprehensive understanding of students' experience (Creswell, 2012). This method allows the researcher to understand learners' strategy and motivation in learning two foreign languages.

The procedures for gathering multiple data were employed for the purpose of this study. A questionnaire and an interview were conducted to each respondent of this study. The questions in the questionnaire were categorized into five different parts which were about languages that are required by the respondents, the frequency of each language use, the level of language ability, the use of each language, and efforts that the respondents do to maintain their languages. More detailed questions were listed in interview questions and asked to the respondents exclusively. The interview took around 15 until 45 minutes.

The procedures of data collection

The data were collected from questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire and interview questions were given to the respondents three days before the interview. The respondents had chance to read the questionnaire and interview questions carefully to get better understanding of what they would share their stories about. The respondents also were given chance to ask if the questions were not clear for them before the interview. The interview was conducted for 20 until 30 minutes using smartphone to record it. The interview questions were asked randomly to create a natural condition and the researcher asked questions that were not listed in interview questions whenever the answer was interesting to dig in more.

After collecting all data, the data analysis was started by the first procedure which is storing the answers of questionnaire and interview in Microsoft excel program. Then, the data were analyzed descriptively and categorized by the types of questions. The interesting data were picked up to be discussed to find out the respondents' strategies and factors affecting it in learning foreign languages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data from questionnaire

Linguistic ecology				
	FCB	MCB	SCB	LE
R1	Javanese	Javanese	Javanese	Master
R2	Palembangnese and Sundanese	Palembangnese and Lampungnese	Javanese	Doctor
R3	Javanese	Javanese	Sumatranese and	Master

				Sundanese		
Note: FCB = father cultural background; MCB = mother cultural background; SCB = spouse cultural background;						
LE = level of education. R1 = respondent 1; R2 = respondent 2; R3 = respondent 3; R4 = respondent 4						
Language ability and the frequency of using the language						
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6
R1	Javanese, often used	Indonesian, always used	English, often used	German, not used now	French, not used now	Dutch, not used now
R2	Indonesian, always used	English, often used	Japanese, rarely used	Palembangnese, not used now	-	-
R3	Javanese, used only with mother	Indonesian, always used	English, rarely used	Japanese, rarely used	-	-
Language proficiency at the moment						
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6
R1	Good	Good	Good	Low (excellent at the time of learning)	Low (excellent at the time of learning)	Low (excellent at the time of learning)
R2	Excellent	Excellent	Not good	Understandable	-	-
R3	Excellent	Low	Understandable	Not good	-	-
Note: L1 = first language acquired; L2 = second language acquired; L3 = third language acquired; L4 = fourth language acquired; L5 = fifth language acquired; L6 = sixth language acquired						
Age of learning languages						
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6
R1	Since a baby	Since in kindergarten	Since in junior high school	Since in senior high school	since in college	Since in college
R2	Since a baby	Since in elementary school	Before five years old	Since lived in Japan	-	-
R3	Since a baby	Since a baby	Since in junior	Since lived in	-	-

			high school	Japan		
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Table 1. Data of respondents from questionnaire: Linguistic ecology; Language ability and the frequency of using the language; Language proficiency at the moment; Age of learning languages; Media of learning languages; Social activities and the language used; Frequency of language use; Activities to maintain the language

From the data shown in Table 1, the researcher discusses three factors in this section namely, kinds of bilingual they are categorized into based on the way of respondents in learning a foreign language, respondents' strategies of learning foreign languages, and factors affecting respondents' in learning foreign languages. Kinds of bilinguals are discussed based on the reason on why they learned foreign languages and whether or not they lose their first language. Respondents' strategies of learning foreign languages is the most interesting part of this study because not all foreign language learners would do the same. Factors that affect the learning strategies give understanding of the reasons respondents chose to do the strategies.

Kinds of bilinguals

According to Baker (2001), there are two kinds of bilinguals in term of language learning. First, elective bilinguals who choose to learn a language in order to add a second language without losing their first language. Second, circumstantial bilinguals who learn another language to survive because of their circumstances. As a result, they possibly lose their first language and it is replaced by the second language. This study shows that all respondents can be categorized into elective bilinguals. R1 learned Indonesian language, German, and French because of the curriculum of school or college where she went to. R1 learned English and Dutch because of her preference. It means all languages were learned in the reason of her choice. R2 and R3 learned Indonesian language and English because of the curriculum of their school started from elementary school until college. R2 learned Japanese also because of the curriculum of his college while his wife (R3) learned Japanese from a course and her environment. R3 often gathered with Japanese women in her children school or in Indonesian embassy. R3 joined many events and activities outside her house (table 1). It can be said that they learned Japanese because of their circumstances. They used Japanese in order to survive living in Japan because they lived there for 6 years. That is why they can also be categorized into circumstantial bilinguals.

Respondents' strategies of learning foreign languages

Based on respondents' experience in learning a language, R1 and R3 experienced what Krashen called as error correction (Lightbrown & Spada, 2003). They admitted that their language learning is a process of making mistake and correction. As R3 said in the interview as follows:

“Sometimes, because of my limited English, I ask my husband how to say what I want to say in English. He said that my English is correct, but it needs small correction. So, I learn English from my husband”.
(R3, on 21 October 2017, my translation)

In addition, R3 has a unique way of learning language. She learns two languages at the same time that is Japanese and English through reading online articles from japantoday.com and nippon-talk.com like she said as follows:

“It is not always and not all. That’s why I use nippon-talk.com which is very good to be used as a media to learn Japanese hiragana and kanji. I can get the meaning from the English version. Sometimes I check the meaning of the English version in dictionary”. (R3, on 21 October 2017, my translation)

She admitted that learning Japanese and English at the same time is not difficult. She considers her way of learning as an effective way in learning language. By doing so, she gets three advantages. She can learn Japanese and English. She also gets the updated news about Japan. This information is really important for her since she has a business. She provides an educational tour which is held twice a year. As the owner, she needs this information to understand the newest situation in Japan. As a guide, she needs to learn Japanese and English in order to communicate with Japanese people and foreigners.

She admitted that learning a new language through reading articles is the easiest way because she is good at writing. This admission is quite convincing because of the fact that she is a book author and a publisher. She has already written more than ten books either by herself or collaboratively with her friends. However, she is not good at listening and speaking. She finds difficulties while someone asks her to speak up her ideas even in Indonesian as a language that she uses every day. As she said that

“because I am an author, I like writing. When I am writing, I could do editing. But when I am speaking, I cannot speak in a good way and produce neat simple sentences. There are people who are smart in speaking up their ideas. In my case, sometimes I need to find the words that are suitable to what I am going to say but it cannot come out of my mind.” (R3, on 21 October 2017, my translation)

Moreover, she admitted that it is difficult for her to understand English grammar. As she said that

“I’m confused if I learn grammar miss, I prefer to use an article directly read automatically I will understand. If there is a suffix -ed it means like this, di- or ter- ... That’s why if I learn English using grammar, I cannot understand. But after escape from grammar I can more understand. In fact, at school, English is taught through grammar. It makes me confused, it is better to learn directly from articles.” (R3, on 21 October 2017, my translation)

Factors affecting respondents’ learning foreign languages

The factors affecting learning foreign languages discussed here are related to what Brown (2007) and Halim (2019) stated. Brown stated that the factors are learner characteristics, linguistic factors, learning processes, age and acquisition, instructional variables, context, and purpose. On the other hand, Halim stated that the factors are motivation, attention, attitude, study habit, self-concept, and student

aptitude. The researcher discusses the results based on the factors stated by these two scholars.

Regarding to her experience in learning Dutch, R1 learned this foreign language because of her curiosity on her inter parent talk at home. The reason that she needs to know what the parents talked about had pushed her to learn this language at a language course. This purpose is also her motivation to learn foreign language. She spent her time to give more attention whenever her parents talk in Dutch. Therefore, her attitude to Dutch got better at that time. Her aptitude changed by changing her study habit in order to learn Dutch. The changing showed by the fact whenever she finds difficulties in learning languages, she solved the problems by consulting them with her seniors and friends (on 4 September 2017, personal communication). By discussing the problems, she got many comprehensible inputs and her language performance could be improved as it is stated by Lightbrown & Spada (2003). Finally, she succeeded to get good scores in Dutch and able to communicate with her parents in Dutch. However, after she could speak Dutch, her parents stopped to speak Dutch as she said

“After I could understand Dutch, my parents didn’t use this language anymore while they were talking about their children”. (R1, on 25 October 2017, my translation)

In terms of study habit, R1 practiced her English better while she was living in Florida for three years (a private talk when she shared her experience long time before the interview). By doing informal and natural communication, it pushes her to communicate correctly and convey meaning (Brown, 2007).

Different from R1, R3 is able to define her best way in learning English and Japanese. Considering her personal characteristics as a person who is not good at listening and speaking, she decided not to use those skills in learning English and Japanese. However, she chose the other two skills as a way in learning these languages. Moreover, considering her problems in learning linguistic factors that is grammar, she chose not learning grammar directly. She decided to learn the grammar through the articles. In terms of learning process, she finds the process will affect her whenever she reads an article. From the article, she can get information about Japanese and learn the context where the sentence patterns use to talk about certain context. At the end, her purpose boosts her efforts in learning these languages. She learns English and Japanese to build her business and grow it as a good promising business internationally.

Finding information about Japan is R3 motivation to get to know Japan better every day. Acquiring English speaking and writing is also her motivation. Due to her motivation in learning foreign languages, she changed her attitude and study habit in order to learn and acquire Japanese. Whenever there is a bilingual article about Japan comes up in the website, she paid more attention and read the article carefully to learn both Japanese and English. By reading online articles, R3 also gets many comprehensible inputs. In terms of study habit, she does informal and natural communication with her two teachers in Japan to give correction on her English and Japanese language. From this communication, she learns English and Japanese by conveying meaning of sentences produced during the communication.

However, R2 did not find any difficulties in learning languages that he acquires. He admitted that for learning English, he often watched movie and went to an English course.

“There is no difficulties that I faced when I was learning those languages. To learn English, I learned from a course and watched movies.” (R2, on 21 October 2017, my translation)

There is not much information given by R2 related to his learning strategies because he did not have much memory of his experience in learning English and Japanese. He only stated that Japanese was learned at his campus while he was pursuing his doctorate study. He can speak Japanese fluently due to intensive communication with his colleagues and professors to discuss his research. He also often communicate with them intensively in daily communication in restaurants after office hours.

CONCLUSION

All participants are categorized into elective bilinguals by choosing to learn languages that they acquire. R2 and R3 are also categorized into circumstantial bilinguals by learning Japanese in order to survive in Japan. In terms of learning languages, an interesting method of learning two new languages, that is reading online Japanese and English articles as well as consulting the languages with her two friends, has been found by R3 as a result of her understanding on her personal characteristics, on her difficulties in learning new languages, on her strength in learning new languages. In R1 case, reading gives a comprehensible input, which is obtained through discussion with her friends, to her as it is said by Lightbrown & Spada (2003). By doing informal and natural communication, R1 and R3 experience a way of learning new language through conveying meaning of the sentences produced, as it is said by Brown (2007). This finding suggests that reading articles can be a best way for someone to learn a new language. By considering the learner characteristics, teacher could take reading online articles as an activity that is a suitable method for the learner who is good at reading and writing to learn a new language.

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