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# Study on Indonesian People as ESL Learners to Become Bilingual Speakers

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Abstract: This paper presents a report on a case study of two bilingual speakers who have the ability to use two different languages alternatively. The first and the second languages of the both speakers are Bahasa Indonesia and English. The information was collected via interview several times. Then, this information was studied and correlated with the existing theory in order to get valid data. As the results, the speakers mention some supporting and influencing situations that progressively affect the speakers from the childhood up to adulthood. The speakers also explain the strategies to overcome some weaknesses during the learning based on their perspective, completed with some suggestion from literature that relates to their condition to acquire English as a second language successfully. As the implication, this report can be acknowledged as information on how these ESL speakers have processed to be bilingual in order to gain better English.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As a language teacher, the writer believes that it is important to understand how people receive the languages through their life. One of the attaining language processes which is interesting to be discussed here is about the background of bilingual speakers. It is about how adults receive two or more languages.

Theoretically, the bilingual speakers have various backgrounds to be able to use more than one language. The existence of the first language may support to be bilingual from the beginning since it becomes relatively easy to gain. The learners have already been able to use their first language in order to support the process to be literate in their first language (Silva, 1992). There are various experiences that evolve the process of learning to be able to read and write fluently. Therefore, it is natural that a learner might have experience to be more comfortable to read and write in her first language since all of these activities have been experienced from childhood until adulthood (Kubota, 2001). Then, the process of this literacy progressively supports and influences the situation around the learners to get the next targeted language

(Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009). Taufiq (2015) even suggests the use of online media to learn and master the second language. Supported with other experience and literatures, the speakers may be directed to be bilingual.

The process of language acquisition itself is a long and complex journey. There is no quick and easy method which is guaranteed to provide success. Various strategies to learn the second language should be applied in order to find the most suitable one related to the learner's needs (Taufiq, 2016).

This paper presents a report on investigation of two bilingual speakers who have the ability to use two different languages alternatively. The both speakers first and the second languages are Bahasa Indonesia and English. The information focuses on how they become bilingual from the childhood until their adults, from being monolingual to be bilingual.

## 2 METHODS

For the purpose of background knowledge in this report, the monolingual is defined as a person who speaks one language only. While to be considered bilingual, as explained by Hornby (1977), the person

has the ability to use two different languages that can be used alternatively; such as Bahasa Indonesia and English. The finding of both interviews will be analysed and discussed in relation to social and cultural perspectives on literacy supported with background reading and referencing.

The purpose of this research is to collect the information on how people receive the languages through their life particularly to be bilingual. The writer uses qualitative method to get the descriptive information about the phenomena.

The information was collected via interview which is recorded several times. Then, this information was studied and correlated with the existing theory in order to get valid data about supporting and influencing situations that affect the speakers to be bilingual. Intentionally, this report can be acknowledged as information on how these ESL speakers have processed to be bilingual in order to gain better English and also as data for further study.

Mostly, the interview was conducted using Bahasa Indonesia which is occasionally switched to English. The consideration to use Bahasa Indonesia is mainly from the fact that the first language of both learners and the writer is this. Hopefully, some important messages which are too difficult and complicated to be explained in English can be explained easily.

The data is processed by focusing, selecting, abstracting, simplifying, and transforming the data transcriptions. The writer organized the data from his notes and transcriptions by discarding the irrelevant information. The data which is relevant would be classified related to the purpose of this study.

The data display is made to make conclusions from the information which is organized and compressed assembly. The conclusions are verified which may be as brief as a short excursion, lengthy argumentation, or extensive efforts to replicate a finding in detail. The writer examines the initial conclusions through references to get more credible information.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first speaker being studied is a thirty-four-year old woman, and the second speaker is a thirty-year old man. Both of them are originally from Indonesia. Their first language is Bahasa Indonesia and the second language are English. Relatively, both of

them can use those two languages interchangeably and fluently.

The first speaker is an English teacher at a senior high school in Indonesia. She is able to communicate using two languages, interchangeably; Bahasa Indonesia and English. Additionally, she is also able to communicate using Javanese Language, which is part of Indonesian dialect. This Javanese dialect is not investigated in this study.

The second speaker has an undergraduate degree certificate majoring in Information Technology from one university in Indonesia and a master degree from a university in Australia. He comes from a family which used to live in a small village with limited educational facilities. Java language, as part of Indonesian dialect, is mainly spoken even at primary schools. He is the only member at the family who continued the education until postgraduate level, particularly in Australia. Now he is staying and working in an office in Indonesia.

The first question asked to the speakers is about what languages they are mastered. Both explain that they understand at least two languages, Bahasa Indonesia and English. To be bilingual, relatively those two speakers are able to use Bahasa Indonesia and English interchangeably and confidently.

The next questions and further are about when the first time the speakers becomes bilingual which is then developed based on their answers. Both speakers have a situation so called sequential bilingualism which learn one language after already established a first language. This is the situation for all those who become bilingual as adults, as well as for many who became bilingual earlier in life (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

The first speaker explains that the first language was transferred from her nearest family; parents and Siblings by the process of acquisition. Krashen (1981) explains that the language acquisition does happen when the process does not need extensive use of mindful grammatical rules, nor require tedious drill. She estimates that she began to be able to use the first language at around two or three, but still could not articulate well until about the age of five. She picked up the spoken language through his parents and older siblings who often correct her speech, or even her grammar. As she remembers, she starts learning the alphabet in kindergarten where in here also she learnt to spell certain simple words and began to practice writing these words. Progressively, she started learning how to read when she was about year two at school.

The development goes slowly and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills. In this case, Family gave the first contribution to the language transfer. The process is then followed and strengthened by the society, like neighbourhoods

and friends to make even better environment for his first language acquisition.

The second mastered language is English. She said that it was first introduced when she went to school. Starting from High School until further higher studies, English is taught as a part of communication means. Further, the ability in the first language supports her to gain the second language (Silva, 1992). Then, the process of this literacy is progressively supported and influenced by the situation around the learners from the childhood into adulthood (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009).

As an English teacher, the first speaker is using Bahasa Indonesia and English in her class. Both languages are commonly used by electronic and paper media such as programs at television, radio and news at newspapers. To get these languages, she thinks that the process is a combination between learning and acquisition. The learning was needed at the first time when she was also learning grammar, having test to measure her language ability as well as having serious drill in order to understand parts or some skills of the languages.

The acquisition also contributes in her process since both languages are normally heard in her everyday life, from TV, radio, or even at the formal activities when she can find it at almost every day.

After her primary school and moving to high school, English was introduced as one of her subjects in class. Mostly, it is taught four up to six hours per week. Until her last academic study at the university, English is received in the process of learning. Everything is based on test and academic achievement. Until now, she considers that she needs to practice, use and learn English. When she watches English programs on TVs she still prefers to have the English subtitles on it.

The discussion was followed by the question of how good she is in the languages. Confidently, she says that she is able to use both Bahasa Indonesia and English very well. However, compared to Bahasa Indonesia, it is not very much for the English. Her ability to be bilingual is basically common particularly who teach English as Second Language. For most countries like Africa, Latin America, and Asia where consist of multi ethnic and cultures, bilingual or even multilingual is generally owned by people with two or more ethnic groups speaking different languages (Hornby, 1977).

Her first language at the first time helped her to understand the second one, since the translation methods as well as the similarity of grammar structures helped her a lot. Theoretically, the influence of first language to the second language acquisition had by the second speaker is already known as language transfer (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1999). Now, she is able to use both languages

interchangeably, and even knows that sometimes there are some terms that cannot be translated by either of two.

Beardsmore (1982) and Bialystok (2001) argue that children become bilingual for many reasons; such as extended family, immigration, temporary residence in another country, dislocation, education, or simply being born in a place where it is assumed at bilingualism is normal. In line with this argument, she becomes bilingual for some demands. The first is education. As mentioned above, the languages being used at her schools are Bahasa Indonesia and English. She is also motivated by individual reasons such as to get better score in the class. Theoretically, this kind of intension to learn the second language can be motivated by the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learners feels to learn the language (Dulay, et al. 1982). This factor theoretically influences the speaker to be bilingual.

By being bilingual, a person may have individual identity as well as attract intergroup relations (Lambert, 1977). Based on the speaker's experience, a bilingual speaker has slightly different status in social community. She might be called as an educated person only because of bilingualism. Some people she knows also have particular special position in her village, where Bahasa Indonesia is still considered luxurious for most elderly people. Additionally, by being bilingual, she may widen her community by being able to speak to more groups of people who originally speak different local languages. This last benefit, furthermore influence the chance to get more friends, relatives from other areas, as well as escalating business and trading.

The discussion was then moving to the next questions, whether there was a problem ever found and how to overcome it. To respond this question, she needs to think a little bit longer to answer. She then decided to give one example of what happened long ago.

When she was around 15, and she was just at year 9 at high school, she and her parent went to relatives in a village where electricity was not there, yet. The village was located at mountain range, and there was no easy road to get there. Mostly people spoke in different dialect in slightly different accent.

She found that she cannot communicate very well with her relative there, especially when the language accent is somewhat different. Bahasa Indonesia also did not help much since mostly she had to speak with elderly that speaking in that language was considered rude.

According to Beardsmore (1982) one of the problems of being bilingual is that connected with anomie. It is a condition where someone feels personal disorientation, anxiety and social isolation. It can be said that the speaker experiences this



anomie. This tends to be psychological aspect rather than social. Beardsmore furthermore adds that this condition may become worse when the speaker has to maintain her languages for different reasons or communities.

To overcome the anomie, it is common now that children and even people around the world make group of bilingual environments, where the use of two languages is the norm (Chin and Wigglesworth, 2007). The good news is that being bilingual is now common especially for the speaker's generation. She never feels the anomie even the two languages are used interchangeably.

As a conclusion, it is true that everyone has different background of being bilingual. The experience of being bilingual also leads to different understanding of life. Since language represent cultures and community, the writer encourages anyone who is bilingual already to keep maintaining it by making connection with other bilingual community and keep practising.

With the slightly same point of view, the second speaker tends to be similar with the first speaker in the way how to get the first language. He does not remember precisely how old he was he started learning the language. However, he is sure that his family, siblings as well as people around him influenced him a lot to gain the first language; including the accent and intonation. He also remembers that his family taught him how to write and read at the first time. The schools furthermore, revised and strengthen what he already knew. It is relevant to the theory mentioned by Krashen (1981), that the first language is received by the process of acquisition. Both speakers admit that the languages were received naturally. For the bilingual speaker however, to get the English as a second language is very different.

English was obtained through the process of learning, since he is motivated to do so, with various reasons such as to get better future job or further standing point. He started to be familiar with English when he was about 14 when he was at high school and continued to learn seriously when he was at the University. Theoretically, this kind of intension to learn the second language such English can be motivated by the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learners feels to learn the language (Dulay, et al. 1982). This factor furthermore, influences the second speaker to be bilingual.

He also believes that his first language, Bahasa Indonesia, is better than his second. Compared to the use of English, the bilingual person tends to believe that his English still needs improvement, especially in vocabularies and pronunciations, since he believes that there are so many words out there, that he does not know what they are and how to spell them.

Different to the first speaker, the second speaker likes speaking and writing in English equally. Sometimes, in an informal situation, he prefers to speak rather than to write his idea. In contrary, in the formal situation like in academic environment, he likes to write since he has more time to prepare and choose his words.

At about 14, he starts learning English in the form of all four skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking. The similarities of some big principles, such as part of speech, and certain rules in using the languages help him to be literate in English. However, he started to enjoy reading various kinds of English text when he was at University, when his English was considerably better. Even there are some different principles between his first and second language, they make the learning more challenging. Theoretically, the influence of first language to the second language acquisition had by the second speaker is already known as language transfer (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1999).

In the use of computer-mediated literacy, both speakers are already familiar with the use of websites and general material from the computer. However, the language acquisition of both types of speakers seemingly does not influence when they can and be familiar with the computer-mediated literacy. The first speaker thinks that the existence of computer does not influence her much in learning the language since it is already late and sometimes still feel a bit overwhelmed with the facilities provided in the computer. The main reason she proposed is that she has never had any formal training in its use. However, she still accesses the computer regularly to read the news from a certain website, to send and receive emails, to research, to write using the word processor, to stay up to date with my course requirements.

For the second speaker, the computer existence with its software and programs really help the bilingual speakers to learn and stay up to date with the information in English. Particularly the existence of social networking, research, word processing, email, blogging, and any other supporting media help him naturally learn the new language and culture. He considers that by the help of computer, he can learn and access information quickly and effectively. It might be related to his job and education in Information and Technology area which mostly uses computer.

Additionally, based on his experience during his study in English speaking country, Australia, the speaker mentions that the literacy influences him a lot to be bilingual. Some other people might have different experience in the process of being literate, particularly when it is connected to the current development of technology. For example, some

people might have their literacy experience by watching television, browsing internet or simply by playing online game. These media can be used to gain information in particular by reading the information. As a part of literacy, reading skill is theoretically believed to be the foundation to gain a higher literacy (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009).

Socially, the second speaker considers that second language is important in order to have socialization process. Submitting a paper in an international journal for example requires an English literacy. Additionally, the process to submit the paper requires a certain time and intensive communication between the writer and the reviewers (Sasaki, 2001). Culturally, it is often found that in practising the second language, the way how to decode the other language may different for example in saying point of view based on the background culture (Yamashita, 2004). Therefore, the situation is connected to the urgency to understand different style between the first and the second language (Sasaki, 2001 and Kubota, 2001).

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

As it is explained above, every speaker may have various experiences differently from the others. The speakers' childhood environments are mostly the situations that influence his first language acquisition which is then supported with further and wider parties to support the second language mastery.

The second language acquisition is supported by the first language literacy. However, the situation to be literate in both languages reminds different. The main differences are influenced by the factor of language environments. "Being literate in other language requires a critical knowledge of how textual conventions and contests of use shape one another" (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009, page 6). The desire to be literate in the second language might be influenced by social, historical or cultural-situated practice (Kern, 2000).

While it is generally believed that in order to gain the second language literacy must have certain academic degree, it must be also understood that the situation is not always related to school-based community. In the recent situation, when time and space is borderless because of technology, to have social interaction may go beyond the country and language. Every day, millions of people are having conversation around the globe, trough internet, phone or television.

As the process of language acquisition goes, Television programs, internet, as well as government

will be the next various situations which support situation in gaining both languages, Bahasa Indonesia and English. As quoted by Hedgcock and Ferris (2009), Smith afterwards suggests that learners may become successful writers when only they are joining into a community of the language users so called "literacy club".

In historical and cultural perspective, various situations support the process of learning and teaching in the second language such as English. The speakers have been long supported by academic culture to gain more knowledge, beyond their first language. Some learners also have orientation to go abroad as the reason to be literate in the other language (Sasaki, 2001 and Kubota, 2001). The experience to have the first-hand experience connecting with other people from other countries, or continuing education there.

In conclusion, as the foundation of bilingualism, it is important to enhance the first language in order to master the second language. By understanding the different situation in learning and teaching of both languages, the teachers and learners can adjust into their communicative activities, in order to achieve a better reading and writing process in both languages.

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