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Thesis Proposal Assignment

The Influence of Culture and Identity on Second Language Acquisition: A perspective from Egypt

Shirley Barber

American University of Cairo

Introduction

Often, in second language classrooms, little or no attention is given by the teacher or curriculum (including the Educational system) towards the identity of the student. A student enters the classroom with his own identity and culture. When acquiring a second language, it is necessary for the student to absorb the culture of the second language, too (Spackman, 2009, p.2). This is where the issue of culture and identity influencing second language acquisition occurs. In general, students represent the identity and culture of their first language and where they come from.

In order for the student to learn the second language he must feel that he is comfortable in the classroom and can express himself freely. However, the students tend to become confused when they are faced with the new culture of the second language. They now have to understand and accommodate this in to their sense of identity and their culture, and this often leads to uncertainty. Furthermore, it results in the student feeling unsure as to where they belong in the community, as they will feel 'out of place'.

The research context describes Egyptian students who are educated in English, who adapt their identities trying to accommodate the differences and who show an increase on their instabilities towards culture and identity. This situation can be approached from two fronts. First, the teacher needs to be aware of this issue and should accommodate it in to the method of teaching and resources used. Second, the educational system (the school context where the research will take place) or institute needs to tailor to this issue by way of the curriculum and how it is implemented. These approaches will be discussed later.

For the previous reasons the purpose of this study is to examine the influences of culture and identity on second language acquisition in a selected sample of seventh grade students of an American private school in Egypt.

The research topic plays a vital role in education in Egypt at many levels. By pursuing it, it would affect the school industry. In turn, it could focus on more pressing issues that would consequently bring institutional changes. For instance, the school could promote professional development courses on second language acquisition and cultural relevant curriculum; improve teaching skills and abilities; augment resources and so on. As a result of the research, the quality of education and the delivery of teaching methods can be improved for the children, and for the country as a whole. This would have to be initiated by the Ministry of Education and enforced on schools throughout Egypt. By equipping the teachers with skills acquired thorough professional developmental programs, it would in turn improve children's education and the overall educational system. One would presume that over a period of time, this may alter the perceived values towards education and educational institutes as it currently stands. Robinson (1999) suggests that factors such as teaching methods, "resources and the training and development of teachers [are essential as an effective] systematic strategy that address [other things such as] school curriculum, and how schools connect with other people" (p.6).

Some of the issues that are of concern will be unveiled in the research process, focusing on comparing results from both second languages taught at the private American school (English and French). In the French Language lesson, for example, due to the nature of the socioeconomic backgrounds, students may respond differently to the focus groups and the observations. In both contexts students would suggest implications of an improved future (university and jobs) by learning a second language. However, this does not necessarily mean that they aim for or will have the same opportunities. The socioeconomic factors play heavily on their options and future goals. It may be implied that students learn English in order to build their skills. However, French may be perceived as an additional factor to contribute to

socially perceived status in the community. Through Gallagher-Bret's (2005) research and results on '700 rationales for language learning', some of the main reasons for learning an additional language were; citizenship, economic, social and political dimensions, personal and social development of the individual and values (p.3).

Another issue to consider is whether or not the families put pressure on their children to learn a second language or not. They may see it as being vital or they may perceive it as merely being a bonus for the student to know another language. Garcia (1991) established that parents expressed interest and appreciation towards their children's high levels of "academic success [because it] was vital to their future economic success" (p.7).

Additionally, in this research study, it is a fact that each teacher has a different technique to teaching, and this may affect the how well students' language the language. In the first context (English language classroom), the teachers are native speakers of English, and are of western backgrounds. In the second context (French language classroom), the teachers are Egyptian, and are graduates of Egyptian universities. The last point to consider is that in a typical public Egyptian school, the number of students in a class can vary from 20 to 40 students per class (in some cases more). Although the research context is an American school, not a public school, this may reflect on teaching methodologies and as a result, students aptitude to learn a language.. This may affect the observations, the teachers' methods and the students' attention in the class during the data collection process. It will be interesting to see how these factors will influence or affect the students and in turn, influence the potential results.

Through this investigation the researcher hypothesizes that the process of learning a second language affects the students' identity and sense of belonging to a community. This is based on the notion that identity is embedded in culture and language. Leveridge (2008)

implies that there is an intrinsic relationship between language, culture and identity and that language is used to express ones' identity and culture.

Literature Review

Culture and Language Acquisition

Gunderson (2000) aptly describes language and culture: "Language and culture are inextricably linked. Unlike the Gordian knot, nothing comes from separating them because they have little or no meaning apart from each other. And English has become a world language, one that dominates business and science. In many respects it is hegemonic. To participate in the world economy and to benefit from the advances of science, it is believed, one must know English" (p.694). This observation about the global stance towards the English language and the benefits of learning it is strongly reflected in Egypt's perception about acquiring English. Perhaps this is factor of colonization from when the British occupied Egypt. It is suggested that social class can also affect identity in language learners (Khatib, 2011). This is due to a particular aspect such as financial matters. For instance, if a language learner does not have similar financial access, he will be somewhat left out or feel like an outsider to an extent. They will feel that they are not socially equal to their co-learners. Another aspect affecting identity may be personal abilities of the student. A personal ability is the competence to do something well. Those two factors can tarnish the students sense of belonging to a community (identity) and perhaps impede their learning. "Although identity is conditioned by social interaction and social structures, it conditions social interaction and social structures at the same time. It is, in short, constitutive of and constituted by the social environment" (Block, 2007, p.866).

On another note, being successful in school means that students must "surrender great parts of their language and culture" and that "culture is part of identity, and identity relates to how well a student does in school and in society" (Gunderson, 2000, p.693). This approach about

language and culture and school attainment rings true with respect to the observations at the research site. Some explanations would support the approach. For instance, the students, predominantly Egyptians, are enrolled in an American school which follows the Virginian State curriculum. Most private schools in Egypt implement a different school curriculum. This will most likely have an effect on the student as an 'end product' of schooling. This implies that when students graduate from this school they will be 'different' to other Egyptian students graduating in Egypt. This may seem to be an asset, but based on personal experiences in Egypt, when the society and government do not recognise the education they choose not to acknowledge it. Therefore, the label of being an outcast is created, and causes gap in such a close-knit community. Cakir (2006) considered developing cultural awareness in foreign language teaching and explored it in a theoretical approach. There are several factors to consider within culture, identity and language that argue how they interconnect. This is due to the country and its people uniting through language. It is implied that language is a way of expressing one's culture, and identity among other things.

The Learning of a Second Language

As previously mentioned, the research topic is concerned with the ways that culture and identity influence second language acquisition. More than often, the identity and culture of the first language are quite different from the culture of the second language. This may lead to the students identity (self, peer and societal) altering or leaving them feeling alienated. Some teachers are not aware of this effect and thus add to the problem. The curriculum contains cultural components and the teacher transmits this either knowingly or not. Learning a second language will theoretically require the learner to adapt his/her values and behaviour (Jund, 2010). This implies that there is a strong connection between the language

and culture and that it is represented in the culture of the speakers. It incorporates aspects such as beliefs, values and needs.

The sociolinguistic aspect of communication refers to the attributes of speech, which rely on social, pragmatic, and cultural elements (Cakir, 2006, p.158). This is noteworthy, as language and interaction might depend on the social status of the speaker or hearer, and on social factors. It is essential to develop an awareness of socio-cultural and sociolinguistic differences between the first language of the student and second language. With such awareness, it may help both the teacher and the student understand issues of unintentional failure and hindrances of communication (Cakir, 2006, p.158). Furthermore, it may result in the discovery of a suitable solution.

Identity and Language Acquisition

Block (2007) discusses methods of data collection on culture, language and identity studies. Empirical research was conducted in order to link second language learning and identity.

When individuals face new social cultures, they find that their sense of identity is weakened and that they suffer and are somewhat confused until a balance is reached. A transformational phase occurs in the identity of the learner. “The result is what has come to be known as a *third place*” (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). This is where there is what Papastergiadis (2000) called a ‘*negotiation of difference*’ during which the past and the present “encounter and transform each other” in the “the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions” (cited in Block, 2007, p.864). It is a notion regarding identity and the essential idea that it revolves around is uncertainty. The feeling of uncertainty stems from being a part of something and feeling apart from it. Likewise, it is the synchronised confirmation and nullification of these feelings. This issue is important as it can create an uncomfortable, unconfident learner, or if nurtured in the classroom, may result in a ‘positive’, well balanced identity in a second language learner.

Learners' identities are not only based on their interactions in the classroom, but rather on a broader scale of the community. It is an "encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relationship to these communities" (Wenger, 1998; cited in Block, 2007, p.865). This relates to the perspective (in my study) of the current situation in Egypt, as Egypt may be categorised and considered a close-knit community. Therefore, it is important for everyone to 'fit-in' to the society. This is due to the nature of the community by which everybody conforms to social or cultural norms.

"Although identity is conditioned by social interaction and social structures, it conditions social interaction and social structures at the same time. It is, in short, constitutive of and constituted by the social environment" (Block, 2007, p.866). He further touches on two views of identity in relation to the identity of a second language learner. First, social class "has strong connections to Marxism, a prototypically structuralist approach to social phenomena" (p.872) and second, is psychoanalytic theory in which Block (2007) states "psychoanalysis presents some difficult questions for those who adhere to the imminently social take on identity" (p.872).

However, social class is only one factor to consider. It is important to investigate how the representative capital of language learners arbitrates the language learning process and the kind of identity work that occurs. In language learning contexts, long-term expectations regarding academic attainment might vary along social class lines. "Of course, this is a very stark contrast, indeed a *classist* one that needs to be teased out. But my point here is that precisely because it does need to be teased out, there is a need for research examining identity work in FL from a social class perspective" (Block, 2007, p.872).

Ajayi (2006) implies that the achievement of multiple identities in order to bring about new forms of social participation along with the simultaneous assistance of multiple

languages and cultures is indispensable to the achievement in English language learning classrooms. His conclusion is based on results that showed students felt that having multilingual and multicultural backgrounds was an advantage. Furthermore, students recommend that it is important to understand and acknowledge how they construct their identities. Also, that the extent to how much students learn in the English Language classroom is reflected by such self-defined images of self.

It can be said that most students learn a second language as an asset in order to fit in and access certain parts of the community in which they wish to belong to. This reflects heavily on the practices of language teaching. "Teachers are then faced with the challenge and opportunity of teaching students to engage critically in the analysis and reconstruction of discourses and texts" (Luke 2000; cited in Ajayi, 2006, p.469). Furthermore, learning a language, culture and identity; language is a method by which one can express himself and his identity. It is also a means to challenge this socially constructed identity, and state his prejudices (Ajayi, 2006). Regarding language learning, it is important to take in to consideration and comprehend how language is "constructive of social formations, communities, and individual identities" (Luke, 1996, p.9).

This highlights the significance of language learning when a student is trying to construct an identity whilst being influenced by external factors such as society and culture.

McCarthy, Fischer & Penny, (2003) conclude that it is crucial for educators and researchers to realise and begin to discuss the issue of "cultural identity, cultural difference, and cultural community" (p.445). In the meantime, it is critical for curriculum to develop and become more effective, as well as to construct forms of instructional practices that accommodate and mirror images of self of English Language Learners. These are concepts considered in the present study as suggestions in order to change and develop the current issue at hand. This not only involves the teachers, but also higher powers such as the Ministry

of Education. In order for this to occur, it should begin with the realisation and acceptance that the students' multilingual and multicultural backgrounds are significant and revered as an essential instrument of learning. Moreover, it may even add new insights as to what the curriculum should cater for. As a suggestion, the role of the school in this context is to assist, adapt and adjust the student population diversity during the learning process. It should concentrate on using the learners' needs, incentives and predilections, among other things.

“English language education is in the process of change regarding teacher identity and the ownership of English. Cultural issues are implicated in this change” (Holliday, 2009, p.144) this is a key concept to be researched in this study, as it must take into consideration national cultures and identities of those learning the English language. He recommends that in order for educators and students to obtain and maintain English and the English language education under their own conditions, we must refrain from defining the culture and nature associated with language. According to Hall (1991a); Hannerz (1991); Moon (2008) this frame of thought is appropriate for professionals in the academic field as it allows for various, yet equal, cultures to be expressed, taught and conceived without getting in to politics of worldwide disparity (cited in Holliday, 2009). Holliday (2009) suggests that during the process of teaching and learning English, national cultures can be understood without creating any form of prejudice or judgement which originates from Durkheims era.

According to Bax (2003) and Holliday (1994), they believe that culture is being handled as a setting approach to English language education, in which the focus is to guarantee that classroom practices and techniques are suitable to the local contexts they are taught in. In another study, Holliday (2009) implies that although this is a rational solution, it does not fully encompass three major attributes; education, politics and culture. These issues play a role in the topic of second language acquisition, culture and identity in relation to Egypt which are examined in the current study. Even though he says it is not a perfect

solution, this study assumes that it is still very important and necessary in classrooms in Egypt, where students are learning English as a second Language.

For too long, research by way of interviews and questionnaires, has not allowed for people who are being researched to express themselves freely (Holliday, 2009). They need to provide the opportunity in which opinions can surface, and the stories of the people can freely develop. Holliday (2009) used 40 informants from 15 countries on a study related to cultural identity and the importance of nation. He contacted them via email in order to ask for their responses as natural and realistic as possible, whilst also allowing them freely express themselves. “Their gradual responses threw out completely my initial research agenda to overturn the national culture paradigm, and took me into new thinking I had not imagined” (Holliday, 2009, p.147). The results displayed that nation (cultural identity) contributed to a partial composite of self-identity. It also demonstrated that their cultural identity could change in context to the social situation, encompassing cultural memberships, too. This result is relevant to the issues that students may face in the classroom, whilst learning English as a second language in Egypt.

Ethnicity and Language Acquisition

Kuo (2006) hints at this when she says that ‘sometimes people will choose to have the original American flavour for its exotic and exciting attraction’ and that some ‘students are fascinated with the exotic flavour of English’ (p. 166, email interview). In these terms, “‘British English’, with an attendant ‘British C2’, as it appears in textbooks, in language classes, and in the pedagogic repertoires of teachers, is not so much a standard language code as a saleable product” (Holliday, 2009, p.151). This must be taken into consideration whilst the curriculum, textbooks and teachers are selected by the school. The “English flavour” or accent plays a strong role in some of the issues this research will examine.. Furthermore, the

notion (mentioned above) about the variations of accents appealing to students, and reflecting on the materials is a vital matter as it may reflect on how parents in Egypt select the education their children will receive.

Perhaps it is time to change the view of how native versus non-native speaking teachers are perceived. If the teacher is from the 'local' context, then they have the upper hand of being knowledgeable in the native language and culture of their students, along with the distinctive concerns they have with learning the English language and culture (Holliday, 2009). This is a point to take into consideration as a possible solution to the problem faced in Egypt with regards to second language acquisition, culture and identity.

Lambert (1973) raised some issues that appeared to be intertwined with and influence culture but hard to distinguish. For instance, social class, types and amounts of schooling, amounts of travel experience and the like from what seemed to be differences attributable solely to cultural setting. He anticipated cultural variations and provided sufficient opportunity for them to flourish, but few if any unambiguous ones did.

Lambert (1973) suggests that by focusing of various belief systems there is an opportunity to comprehend the real-world significance of cultural and linguistic backgrounds regarding learning and education and ways of enhancing the learning experiences of young people from diverse circumstances. He anticipated that the learners' incentive.....to study a language would be established by his/her mind-set and willingness to identify and by his/her instrumental and or integrative orientation to the procedure of learning a second language. An "instrumental" outlook, represents the practical significance and benefits of learning a new language, and an "integrative" stance, represents a genuine and personal concern towards the people and culture characterized by the 'other' group. He believes that the linguistic distinctiveness and the personal identity of an ethnic group is established by the connection between the culture and language that influences on structures of thought and personality. For

this research study the connection between the thought and personal identity regarding the members within an ethnic group will be examined.

Jund (2010) applied a critical pedagogy approach in order to examine roles and relationships between history, industry and the media with regard to the choices people make” in relation to the topic. The results showed that the students applied multiple identities depending on the context. Furthermore, it can be inferred from this study that teachers should move towards a “pedagogy of intercultural understanding” approach to teaching. Jund (2010) states that the social constructivist perspective of an intercultural classroom allows group members to develop relationships in order to “create social realities and thus, culture (along with gender, race, class, power, etc.) is conceived of as a social construct, [and not a] static phenomena” (p.3). She notes that many teachers assume certain characteristics of students based on the country of origin. However, she suggests that it is essential to seek proof of” how cultural identity and cultural differences may or may not emerge as a relevant construct” (p.4). Additionally, that in English for Academic Purposes classrooms, teachers and students are often trying to use their ethnic backgrounds and linguistic ranges in order to understand the world. This analysis carried out in the study focused on several issues, such as “how the speakers constructed multiple meanings of culture, cultural differences, and cultural identity” (p.2). Furthermore, Jund (2010) discusses that regardless of culture (whether national, academic or ethnic) it may be implicitly or explicitly taught during EAP classes. This could be a method of acculturating students to the ‘norms and behaviours’ of mainstream American culture, as presented in the educational materials used at school. On the other hand, Singh and Doherty (2004) as cited by Jund (2010) suggest that it should be viewed as an intercultural opportunity where cultures are exchanged and transmitted via experiences rather than solely using text books. She proposes

that teachers can incorporate cultural variations into their materials and lessons as opposed to the compare and contrast approach to culture.

In Li and Girvan's (2004) findings, the teacher claims that perhaps age, socioeconomic backgrounds, and other factors might contribute to class dynamics rather than ethnicity or nationality. Additionally, some have considered language-learning as a conflict of cultures and a process necessitating modifications in identity and cultural association consequently, changing in to a different person (Li and Girvan, 2004). According to language transfer researchers there is a gap between the first language and the second language that a person acquires and that this may have a negative effect on language transfer. It is believed that this is brought on by factors such as social, ethical and historical backgrounds (Li and Girvan, 2004). "Language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking" (Deng and Liu, 1995, p.3).

Lado (1961) asserted that learning a second language was a different task from learning the first language and that the basic problems arise primarily out of the special set created by habits of the first-language. This signals aspects of culture and suggests that the process of language-learning involves the creation of new individuals and cultural identities (cited in Li and Girvan, 2004). In general, it can be inferred that these problems continue to occur in settings where the teacher is unaware or untrained to accommodate them into their methods of teaching. It is suggested that teachers must think of the notion of culture in the classroom in being more than random and spontaneous, rather than transferring cultural information between target cultures and local cultures. New methodologies would focus on understanding relational methods of meaning (Li and Girvan, 2004).

Social Capital and Cultural Identity

The large scale of data from various countries that Green and Preston (2001) use in the analysis of education and societal cohesion, confirms that “Education is a powerful generator of social capital” (Green and Preston, 2001, p.1). In Egypt, education is perceived as a generator of social capital especially amongst the ‘elite’ social group. This relates to social capital theorists who have specifically addressed questions about learning, have mostly treated education as an outcome of social capital rather than as a cause.

Education in Egypt, as is currently stands, does not follow Emile Durkheim’s (1977) systematic theorization of the historical role and social function of mass education. He views it in terms of social integration: ‘Society,’ he wrote, ‘can only exist if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity. Education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands.’ (cited in Green and Preston, 2001, p.5). This ‘homogeneity’ is divided by the social classes in Egypt, and in turn the various educational institutions that exist to cater for the needs of the socio-economical perceived images.

Putnam (1995) defines social capital as the ‘features of social life - networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (p.664) . “Education has a powerful effect on social capital, being the strongest predictor of individual associational membership, trust and political participation” (Putnam, 1995, p.667). It is the lack of the shared objectives in Egyptian society that leaves a gap between the end products (graduated students) as they graduate from various institutes and causes a ridge in society. They graduate, but are usually unsuccessful in being employed, therefore they do not join the network of social capital, removing the associational membership. Thus, creating small networks and groups within society and a lack in the larger

scale of membership. Education must change and cater towards minimising this gap in society, and focus on a 'whole' body, reducing the socio-economical essence.

Teaching Language Strategies and Cultural Identity

Allison & Rehm (2007) suggested strategies teachers ought to apply in their multilingual/ multicultural classrooms. They listed visual aids, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and alternative assessments. Visual aids for students who are learning English have been proven as beneficial resources (Allison & Rehm, 2007). Visuals aids are universally understood and stimulate students. Additionally, visual aids can help to make learning more meaningful, particularly for varied students who are likely to be tactile, kinaesthetic learners. Visual aids make certain that English language learners assign meaning and mental images to vocabulary and notions through the application of concrete teaching resources (Curtin, 2006).

A second strategy that is used is peer tutoring which pairs two students of differing abilities and backgrounds. It has been found to be extremely effective in multicultural classrooms, especially with English language learners (Allison & Rehm, 2007). It motivates students while encourages communication.

The third strategy is called Cooperative learning. It is an approach that aids all students, in particular students from different circumstances. It also assists diverse students in developing intellectual autonomy The use of alternative assessments within classrooms is a universally sound teaching practice that is particularly appropriate for diverse learners (Hodges, 2001; cited in Allison & Rehm, 2007). Assessment techniques should accommodate and be relevant to the cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and life experiences of all students. Thus, alternative assessment methods are recognized, as they provide ways for English language learners to demonstrate cognitive understanding without heavily relying on language (Allison & Rehm, 2007).

Based on the literature review, there are some questions that this paper aims to answer. Firstly, what instructional and administrative steps should the school take to enhance the English learner as well as enhancing Egyptian cultural identity? Secondly, what are the existing evidence that the process of learning a second language affects the students' identity and sense of belonging to a community? What instructional strategies are more effective on the encouragement of second language learners? And what are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate Egyptian students to learn a second language?

Methodology

Language, culture and identity are intrinsically interrelated. The Egyptian educational system, especially the subsystems of private international schools is the target of this study. It is hypothesized that the process of learning a second language affects the students' identity and sense of belonging to a community. The present study will look for answers following a qualitative methodology that involved the steps of: (a) purpose statement and research questions, (b) description of the research design, (c) site characteristics, (d) informants, (e) data collection and instrumentation, (f) data analysis, and (h) timeline.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the process of learning a second language and how it affects the students' identity and sense of belonging to a community. Based on different studies supporting this fact, this study will seek responses to the following questions:

1. What instructional and administrative steps should the school take to enhance the English learner as well as enhancing Egyptian cultural identity?
2. What are the existing evidence that the process of learning a second language affects the students' identity and sense of belonging to a community?
3. What instructional strategies are more effective on the encouragement of second language learners?
4. What are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate Egyptian students to learn a second language?

Research Design

The qualitative research design known as content analysis which is used to identify the specific characteristics of a body of material (any verbal, visual, or behavioral form of communication) with the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases that will help understand in-depth sense how students perceive the phenomenon of their second language acquisition, culture and identity. The qualitative research design of content analysis is preferable, as the concepts require probing, scenarios, and discussion. It is important to understand the phenomena of language, culture and identity from how the students' perspectives and view of the situation.

Site Characteristics

The research will be conducted in an American private school in Egypt. For the sake of this paper and anonymity, the school will be known as private American school. This particular school was selected due to what it represents in its settings (Egypt). The school is located in the fifth settlement in New Cairo, Egypt. The focus of the research will be primarily within the confines of private American school. In Egypt, this is connected to the perceived image that is culturally set and links in to identity. It can be generalized that Egyptian society view private schools as being elite and providing the best education.

Description of the site

The school was established in 2004. The primary school consists of 250 students and 26 staff members. Middle school consists of 330 students with 32 staff members. The High school consists of 375 students with 38 staff members. The school implements the Virginia State Curriculum K-12. They focus on a Learner Centered Design.

Informants' Description

The participants or informants of this study are seven grade students whose ages are between 11-13 years old with the majority being native Egyptians, with some being of other Arab backgrounds. Some of the students have had exposure to western cultures either via travel or due to living abroad. The criteria for selecting informants from grade seven is due to two conditions. Primarily, the researcher teaches grade seven at private American school. Secondly, grade seven is formed by adolescents, a critical age at which they begin to develop and explore issues of identity. Begley (2000) as cited by Meece and Daniels (2008) indicated that the “frontal lobes undergo significant changes between the ages of 10 and 12” This is important in the selection of the informants because those areas are “responsible for language as well as emotional control [which] do not fully mature until the age of 16” (Meece & Daniels, 2008, p.68). The formation and development of self-identity and language at an adolescent age can then be confirmed.

The informants-students will be selected by using a software program that the school uses called Easy Grade. It is primarily used to electronically record the students’ grades but it also possesses other options. One of these options is to randomly select students on the selected class list in order to put them in to groups. This random selection process will determine who will participate in the the focus groups.

Two teachers will be contacted for the purpose of the research. The first teacher is a native speaker of English. He is American. He has three to five years of English teaching experience in Egypt. The second teacher is Egyptian and Arabic is her first Language. She teaches French and has up to 10 years of French teaching experience. Both teachers work in the middle school sector (grades six to eight).

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection will include focus groups of 7th grade students (mixed gender), ages range between 11 to 12 years old and teachers' semi structured interviews. Parental consent will be required before any form of data collection will proceed.

Focus groups will consist of not more than 12 students. During the focus groups, students will be asked to casually answer a few questions in order to extract information. The nature of the questions will revolve around why they are learning English, what it means to them, what are the motivation mechanisms that they use to learn a second language, what are the personal strategies they use to help acquire a second language, and what are the obstacles and challenges they face when learning a second language.

Some other questions to the students are: what they think about the language they are learning in a variety of ways; what is the image of a "perfect English speaker" (including details on the physical appearance of the person, professionalism, and personality features). Also, questions about embarrassment with the level of English language spoken by their friends. Other questions will include parents' perceptions and reactions on the acceptance or refusal of learning English as a second language. In terms of phonetic sound of the language, some questions will seek for explanation on sound of the Arabic language to an English speaker who has never heard Arabic, or the opposite the English language sounds of an Arabic speaker who has never heard English. Finally, a question on cultural relevancy and attractiveness of the advertising through English and or Arabic billboards.

Several steps are included in the data collection process. The students will be informed on what the research focus is. In regard to participating teachers, information on the purpose and questions as well as their role in the research will be explained. Two phases for student focus groups will be held. One prior to observations, then I will meet them again at a later point in time to see if their answers change and to possibly ask some news questions. This is to pose as a follow-up to see what they are experiencing for each teacher, two sets of

interviews will be conducted. Some of the interview questions to teachers refer to their perceptions of student identity, their sense of belonging to a community, the language strategies they use in the classroom that are culturally appropriate, their encouragement strategies to learn a second language, and the motivation factors to learn a second language. Additional questions will be asked related to how they deal with Egyptian second language learners? How they perceive the language/identity issues?

The field notes will be used to record the classroom observations, focus groups and teacher interviews. The field notes for the classroom observations will capture the essence of the interactions based on the concepts discussed in the literature review. The field notes for the focus groups will record what the students say in relation to the questions to the semi structured interview. At this focus group process, the researcher will present a few questions and allow the students to express themselves without limitations. The final set of field notes will serve to record teachers' responses to the semi structured interviews. The teachers will be asked the same questions. But they will have no limitations to freely express their professional opinions.

An additional source of data will be observations during the English lessons. As previously mentioned, they will comprise approximately 40 students, divided into two classrooms. Each lesson lasts for 50 minutes. One morning observation (before break time) will provide the most accurate results. This is because after break time and during the afternoon, the students become easily distracted and do not focus well in class. The role of the researcher will be passive, sitting at the back of the classroom and not interfering with the lesson. Because of the familiarity of the informants and the researcher, it is expected that no disruptions will be created in the classroom. Field notes will be taken during the lesson conducted by the teachers and the students' reactions to the curriculum content. Observations will be conducted twice a week, for the duration of 20 minutes, over the span of one month.

Both teachers, the French Language teacher and the English teacher will be interviewed in order to review the results and discuss the potential relationships, if any.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed by way of content analysis. Hsieh & Shannon (2005) define qualitative content analysis as: “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p.1278). Qualitative content analysis accentuates a combined view of discourse/writings and to the specific contexts they are in. Qualitative content analysis “allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.1).

For the qualitative data recorded in the field notes, there will be a careful and meticulous reading process to identify the themes that are similar and or different from each of the informant groups: teachers and students. It is expected that some words such as society, culture, identity, future attainment due to language, teaching culture, learning foreign language; cultural awareness; culture based activities, teaching language methods and techniques may appear frequently in the narratives.

Another set of comparisons will be between observations in the English Language lessons and the French Language lessons. This will be carried out in order to encompass a holistic perspective of second language learning at this particular private American school. Furthermore, it will allow to compare the differences in results, taking into consideration factors such as socioeconomic backgrounds, identities, learning English and/or French as a

second language in their classroom, teaching strategies for second language learners among other factors. From these interviews, three short narratives will be created. One narrative will come from English teacher, another one from the French Language teacher, and a personal narrative from the perspective of the participant observer which will consist of counts on experiences from both students and teachers.

Timeline of Events

The events to proceed with the research study will involve internal and external processes. They are as follow:

1. Selection of thesis advisor on March 2012.
2. Submission of the thesis proposal to IRB and CAPMAS for approval on June 2012.
3. After the approval of the thesis project, parent consent forms will be mailed to the seventh grade students requesting permission to collect data from students. The parent consent will be mailed on July 2012.
4. Requesting permissions from the school administration to interview and observe selected teachers, July 2012.
5. Data collection process will begin on September 2012
6. Final report writing on October 2012
7. Final thesis project submission on November 2012

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