

IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES OF BECOMING BILINGUAL (A Literature Review)

Sabarniati¹, Naria Fitriani²

¹Department of Electronical Engineering, Politeknik Aceh, Banda Aceh

²Department of Accounting, Politeknik Aceh, Banda Aceh

e-mail: sabarniati@politeknikaceh.ac.id, naria@politeknikaceh.ac.id

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47647/jsr.v13i3.2069>

ABSTRACT

An individual or immigrant with his experience of acquiring bilingual naturally confronts some obstacles. The process of developing the person's bilingual has been in different phases. There were inquiries about the adult's difficulties acquiring the target language. Relating to those issues, this study aims at examining experts' perspectives on how immigrants acquire bilingualism. All documents including articles and researches correlating with this topic were collected. The chosen data were evaluated, in sighted, argued and drafted qualitatively. Regarding with this issue there are four topics discussed in detail; fossilization, native-like attainment, language maintenance and language threat. Among of them, fossilization plays an essential role for it as it concerns on adult's bilingual.

Keywords: *Immigrant, bilingualism, fossilization, causes.*

ABSTRAK

Seseorang dengan pengalaman menguasai dua bahasa tentu saja menghadapi beberapa kendala. Proses perkembangan kemampuan berbahasa asing seseorang melewati tahapan yang berbeda-beda. Terdapat persoalan tentang kesulitan orang dewasa dalam menguasai bahasa target. Berkaitan dengan permasalahan tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perspektif para ahli tentang bagaimana imigran memperoleh atau menguasai bahasa kedua/asing. Semua dokumen termasuk artikel dan penelitian yang berhubungan dengan topik ini dikumpulkan. Data yang dipilih dipelajari, dievaluasi, diperdebatkan, dan disusun secara kualitatif. Terkait permasalahan ini ada empat topik yang dibahas secara rinci; fosilisasi, pencapaian berbahasa seperti penduduk asli, pemeliharaan bahasa ibu dan ancaman bahasa. Diantaranya, fosilisasi memainkan peran penting dalam kaitannya dengan kemampuan berbahasa orang dewasa.

Keywords: *Imigran, kemampuan dua bahasa, fosilisasi, faktor penyebab.*

1. Background of Study

Immigrants have experienced different processes of acquiring a new language. It depends on the reason why they came to the new country. Some individuals have learned the target language before coming to the host country, others came without knowing a word of the community language. People may lose their confidence when they are incapable of addressing good communication. Having no ideas/words to speak up would endanger one's self-

performance among strangers. It is crucial when coming into a new community but the person cannot speak the local language, he will have trouble connecting with the people. Otherwise, gestures must be used to make communication happen. Yet, the application of gestures never performs as well as oral language does. More and more gestures often differ across cultures, as mentioned that different culture interprets gestures differently, and this leads to misunderstanding in communication (Damanhour, 2018).

These different situations affect the process of the people in acquiring the target language. The first group of people intentionally learned the new language without force, but the second group generally was forced to acquire the language because they would not survive in the new community unless they spoke the language. This article is a continuing study of our previous field research about Indonesian and German immigrants living in Australia for more than 20 years (Sabarniati & Fitriani, 2023). Although they had started learning English at their teen ages, both of them came to Australia with limited proficiency in English. A German lady had to speak and be fluent in English otherwise she would not survive as she could not work and earn money without being communicatively using the language. In fact, when coming firstly to Australia, the only English word that she knew was “tomorrow”. There was a hilarious experienced she told us that each time her schoolmates and teachers asked her questions, she just replied “tomorrow”. This was an embarrassing moment, which then became a great motivation for her to speedy acquire English.

The Indonesian lady, on the other hand, had a lighter burden as she was a housewife, her husband earned money for her and the children, and she could just speak the Indonesian language with the whole family. The only circumstance when she needed to speak English was while going shopping and interacting with the people around her, and that was not a big deal. These diverse experiences brought them to different levels of language acquisition they went through even though they shared similar living periods in Australia.

Regardless of the variety of processes people acquire a second language, this study tried to draw the underlying existence issues that provoke their bilingualism; fossilization, native-like

attainment, language maintenance, and language threat. We focused on the issue of fossilization as it is a chronic condition amongst adult bilinguals.

Referring to our previous study, the Indonesian immigrant failed to de-fossilize herself into English, as she speaks English with the interference from Indonesian language. My observation proved that she also often mixed both English and Indonesian in a single sentence when talking with her husband and children. For example, she said to her daughter "Put your baju properly!", baju is an Indonesian word for cloth. She surely knows the correct word in English, but her tongue unintentionally spoke the word in her L1 which is a signal of fossilization. Besides, we also found numerous errors in pronouncing the English words as she talked.

Being interested in such an issue, we intended to conduct a literature review regarding it, thus previous research concerning similar focus was studied for gaining the aims of this research. This study aims to scrutinize experts' points of view about the proficiency of immigrant bilinguals in addressing proper communication in English. The proficiency was measured to the degree of de-fossilization stages then went through. These perspectives were examined and drawn in the implementations for language studies.

2. Method

In this qualitative study, the method employed library study which were collected several documents relate to this bilingual issue. The main steps in this study are gathering the resources and presenting the data. The methods are used to gather, analyze, and draw conclusions from the data in a methodical manner in order to identify solutions to issues encountered (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). The

data from textbooks, chapters and articles were reviewed then chosen the relevant issues. Additionally, they were evaluated, insighted, argued and drafted (George, 2008). In other words, collecting the data, the subtopics were classified and exhaustively discussed.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Fossilization

As introduced by (Selinker, 1972) that fossilization is the middle stages between native and target language. The issue of fossilization transpires due to the perspective that foreign language learners failed to reach the similar competence of native speaker. No matter what the age of learners and how much inputs and instructions they get, they hardly grasp their proficiency in the target language as fluent as the native speakers do (Zhang, 2017). Accordingly, Zhang (2017) mentioned three main reasons or causes of fossilization: insufficient quantity and inappropriate quality of input, the affective filter, and language transfer in lexical level. Another research on fossilization issue remarked that culture has a great influence in one's foreign language learner acquiring a target language (Yang, 2017). An interesting claim stated in his research report is that learners' approval of the culture of a language decides the success of learning that language. So, if the students have lower level of acceptance to the foreign language culture, they will need longer time to de-fossilize themselves in acquiring that language. It is a reasonable yet questionable perspective that to which degree the L2 learners categorized as accepting the culture of the target language. We agree that when the L2 students have positive attitudes towards the L2 culture, they probably expose themselves to the target language more easily. But, this acceptance does not

necessarily mean imitating their tradition and cultures, because the students have to persist their origin cultural norms in order to sustain original identity.

A related study drawn more causes of fossilization had been conducted amongst foreign language learners in China (Shi et al., 2019). They noticed external and internal factors of fossilization in foreign language learners. The former includes: imitation of the wrong pronunciation, lack of authentic audio input, and lack of proper feedbacks. Whereas the latter includes: acoustic perceptibility, disharmony between neural system and vocal organs, attitudes and beliefs. These factors have strong correlation and similarity with those suggested previously by Zhang and Yang. Even though Shi and his colleagues revealed more causes of fossilization, Zhang generalized the causes into huge areas. The three factors which belong to the external factor, are basically could be generalized into one issue as suggested by Zhang as the insufficient quantity and inappropriate quality of input. So, we should comprehend the different issues provoked by these scholars as connecting issues each other.

Immigrants who had started learning English before coming to an English speaking country showed their minimum competence in addressing casual conversation because they learned the L2 in a non-natural teaching environment where English is a foreign language (Trillo, 2002). That is because they were exposed to structured formal English textbooks back home. Besides, their English teachers were local residents or non-native English speakers. This shows an agreement to one of the causes of fossilization (insufficient and inappropriate input) noted by Zhang and Shi. Thus, not only because the students had little exposure to natural casual English conversation, but also the teachers

themselves had lack access and experiences of the real English talks. Therefore, when coming to an English speaking country, those people had difficulty understanding and expressing their ideas in the natural casual conversation of English.

A brief evidence that Turk people cannot pronounce the schwa (ə) sound is the true fossilization faced by Turks in speaking English. Turkish is a syllable-timed language that the vowels are not reduced, so that each of its vowels does not have variation in sound (Demirezen, 2010). He elaborated that even Turkish English teachers had not able to pronounce the schwa sound properly when talking English. They knew and aware that they pronounced them incorrectly, but they feel hardship to correct it. He concluded that fact as a psycho-phonetic difficulty for Turks due to their syllable-timed mother tongue.

A study whether fossilization could be remedied had been done for a group of Japanese English learners (Butler-tanaka, 2000). The result showed that it is hardly possible to achieve de-fossilization amongst L2 learners. Butler found his research inconclusive as the groups of participants varied in many ways. He faced troubles in addressing different stages of students both in their proficiency and motivation. Thus, the result of his research became less accurate.

Demirezen and his colleague conducted a parallel research analyzing the motivation of Turkish teachers of English to remedy their fossilization pronunciation errors (Demirezen & Topal, 2015). Their study told that 70% of the participants had great motivation to fix their fossilized pronunciation errors. However, their positive attitudes and efforts to remedy the fossilization had not yet been proved to succeed. Even if they had taken

professional courses and years of teaching experiences, still the participants had the interference of L1 in their L2. A more profound investigation should be addressed to figure out the underlying crucial factors of unsuccessful de-fossilization amongst teachers of English. The disharmony between neural system and vocal organs as one of the internal causes suggested by Shi and her colleagues could be essential to be studied since this is a permanent situation in which people could not transform.

A similar research stated that bilingual's speech is influenced by the rhythm of his first language (L1) (Liu & Takeda, 2021). They chose English, Japanese and Mandarin as their research focus, and found that vowel reduction has a significant correspondence with speech rate. As a result, Japanese or Chinese have lower rate speech when talking English because their origin languages (Japanese and Mandarin) are of different rhythm from English. Unfortunately, studies whether the rhythm issue could be remedied have not yet been found.

The fossilization has than a great deal with the issue of native-like attainment. Learners whose fossilization was not resolved would make them unable to attain the native-like ability.

3.2. Native-like Attainment

The latest and largest goal of SLA learners is to be native-like in the target language. This native-like surely will not be acquired without excessive exposure to the language. However, children who were exposed to two languages in their early ages do not have a guarantee of being native-like (Hoff, 2018). Regardless their early exposure to the target language, in fact, the quality of it is inadequate since their main sources of the language (their parents) are less proficient. Even their

parents came to the country with limited proficiency of the language, means both parents and children were acquiring the language at the same time. In turns, the children might gain the native-like proficiency faster than their parents. Therefore, a study about lexical fossilization addressed that foreign language learners, especially adult learners, cannot clutch lexical knowledge like native speakers (Zhang, 2017). Their lexical acquaintance had to be at the position below the natives due to the interference of their L1.

However, being native-like is such a confusing issue, because it is difficult to address to which “English” you want to be native-like (Simon, 2005). A huge population of people who use English throughout the globe causes this confusion. There are Indian English, Malaysian English, Chinese English, Australian English, and many more Englishes beside American and British English.

3.3. Language Maintenance

There was a lack emphasis on supporting the existence of local, minority and indigenous languages. When people had acquired a new language, they feel they are fine and proud of being fluent in that language and start avoiding themselves from speaking with local languages. They did not realize that once they stopped using the local language, their identity shifted, which lead them to lose their cultural pride (Amery, 2019).

An inquiry about maintaining mother tongue had been conducted in Tanjung Lesung, Banten, Indonesia (Sulistiyaningsih, Siti et al., 2017). The local people are using Indonesian language to communicate not only with tourists but also with the local tribes. In fact, their mother tongue is not Indonesian language,

yet it is the national language of Indonesia. Here, we need to underline that each province in Indonesia has a particular mother tongue which is totally different across all provinces. So, if the people of a certain area stop speaking the local indigenous language, it is then at high risk of being shifted which in turn becomes extinct. Therefore, Sulistiyaningsih and her colleagues suggested maintaining mother tongue by passing it in the family. They called this effort as intergenerational mother tongue continuity, where each family in keep using the local language with their descendants to prevent from losing their ancestral language. A similar scholar’s perspective had been found that indicated the most consistent research findings to maintain a heritage language is by using it for parent-child communication at home (Östman et al., 2016).

To be honest, the illustrated situation described above is actually transpired in all provinces in Indonesia. Not so many families are maintaining their local languages. It a sad phenomenon in Indonesia that the people have lack awareness of losing their ancestral languages by stop passing them. Even worse, if they do aware of losing the indigenous languages, but they do not recognize that their culture and identity will be shifted as well. Consequently, we need to encourage and promote using ancestral languages to the local people of Indonesia.

Using one dominant language causes the other becomes less important. The dominant of one language is extremely influenced by the environment where a bilingual spends time frequently. Also, the dominant language is like reaching high status and value compared to the less popular one and it is really influenced by the context and community. When a bilingual works in a place in which there is only English is used as a medium, she has

no other preferences to communicate in another language. In that context, using other languages is useless because there might be no one is being able to speak her language (Sabarniati & Fitriani, 2023)

Maintaining a particular native language seems to be a more reasonable reason for using the language at home, especially with children. Otherwise, the native language risks being lost as more and more people do not feel the need to use the language. Home is in fact the best place to maintain mother tongue. Parents should keep speaking their origin language with the children even though they live in an English speaking country.

3.3. Language Threats

Bilingual children have the opportunity to choose which language to speak, and they certainly chose to speak the more prestigious language than the other (Hoff, 2018). This fact becomes a threat for the minority languages. The dominance of international languages is believed as one of the sources of language loss (Dastgoshadeh, 2019). They added, "Linguists estimate that of the approximately 6500 languages worldwide, about half are endangered or on the brink of extinction". This vast number of endangered languages requires severe concern, including stakeholders, language practitioners, language educators, and even civil people. We must be conscious that our language would probably be at risk of being lost. Then, the consciousness should be streamed by actions to lower the risk of those endangered languages.

Although bilingual people are expected to be more educated and socially, politically and economically favorable, more significant damage could happen when the indigenous languages are ignored. In particular, language loss has

proven to harm being bilingual significantly. It is one of the biggest problems in a community because once the language is extinct, a particular society's identity will also be shifted.

We must be conscious that our language would probably be at risk of being lost. Then, the consciousness should be streamed by actions to lower the risk of those endangered languages. Meanwhile, (Hamza Atirnigar et al., 2021) adopted this term as language death to analyze the reasons of it. They believed that language death has been linked to a variety of factors, including culture, bilingualism, migration, and natural disasters. Additionally, they stated that mixed-married people may also have language loss or a lack of language development if the couples do not aware and do not take any efforts to maintain their mother tongues. Even though the couples have different L1, it is actually a chance for them to expose their children to both languages at early ages. Mother and father could speak different languages to the children, thus both L1 are away from the threat.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

Becoming bilingual is not only about adding a new language into our linguistic list. Language shift plays a great role in risking a minority language to be extinct. In the concern of bilingualism, there are four main points might be considered; fossilization, native-like attainment, language maintenance and language threat. Therefore, one should balance the domain use of both languages in order to maintain either the mother tongue or the cultural identity of the person.

The interlanguage or fossilization issue is real and unavoidable. Amongst the

relevant research that had been collected and analyzed, none shows adequate success in remedying the fossilization in learners' L2 production. Several treatments and courses had been given to the L2 learners or even teachers of English, but the results were not satisfying. Thus, language scholars had addressed a number of factors or causes, including external and internal, of fossilization. Amongst the causes elaborated, insufficient quantity and quality of input plays a prominent role in causing L2 learners to be fossilized with their L1. Another pivotal factor described is the disharmony of rhythms and vocal sound between the L1 and L2.

Since bilingualism has been the language issue for immigrant particularly, several suggestions can be interpreted. The future bilingualism studies are recommended to conduct about bilingualism on immigrants by grouping the participants. It is based on the age, gender or the length of staying in the host country. Not only immigrants' experience, their efforts during the language proficiency should be considered to be investigated. Moreover, further studies regarding fossilization should be conducted as well in order to awaken more factors that cause the interlanguage and figure out the solutions to remedy the fossilization in L2 learners.

5. Acknowledgments

This research was financially supported by the department of research and community services of Politeknik Aceh, Indonesia in 2023. We appreciate deeply for the support of our internal department to conduct this study.

References

- Amery, R. (2019). *LANGUAGE IS MORE THAN COMMUNICATION: WHY WE SHOULD MAINTAIN THE MOTHER TONGUE AND PROMOTE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY*. 2019, 1–5.
- Butler-tanaka, P. (2000). Fossilization : a Chronic Condition or Is Consciousness-Raising the Cure? *Dissertation*.
<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/cels/essays/matefltesldissertations/ButlerTdiss.pdf>
- Dastgoshadeh, A. (2019). *Language loss , Identity , and English as an International Language*. June 2011.
- Demirezen, M. (2010). The causes of the schwa phoneme as a fossilized pronunciation problem for Turks. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 1567–1571.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.237>
- Demirezen, M., & Topal, I. H. (2015). Fossilized Pronunciation Errors from the Perspectives of Turkish Teachers of English and their Implications. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, 793–800.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.613>
- Farisiyah, U., & Zamzani, Z. (2018). *Languange Shift and Language Maintenance of Local Languages toward Indonesian*. February.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/iccsr-18.2018.50>
- Hamza Atirnigar, Zarif Mohammad Safari, & Abdul Hoda Rafat. (2021). Exploring the Causes of Language Death: A Review Paper Teaching Assistant Teaching Assistant. *International Journal of Arts and*

- Social Science*, 4(4), 181–186.
www.ijassjournal.com
- Hoff, E. (2018). Bilingual Development in Children of Immigrant Families. *Physiology & Behavior*, 176(3), 139–148.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12262>. Bilingual
- Liu, S., & Takeda, K. (2021). Mora-timed, stress-timed, and syllable-timed rhythm classes: Clues in English speech production by bilingual speakers. *Acta Linguistica Academica*, 68(3), 350–369.
<https://doi.org/10.1556/2062.2021.00469>
- Östman, J. O., Verschuren, J., & Amsterdam, J. B. (2016). Willoughby, LJV, In press, Language maintenance, in Handbook of Pragmatics, eds. *Academia.Edu*.
https://www.academia.edu/download/57614222/Language_Maintenance_and_Shift_-_HoP.pdf
- Sabarniati, S., & Fitriani, N. (2023). *Immigrants' Experiences of Becoming Bilingual (A Case Study of German and Indonesian bilinguals Living in Australia)*. 3(2).
- Selinker, L. (1972). Selinker, L., Interlanguage, IRAL; International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 10:3 (1972) p.209. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 3(1972), 209–231.
- Shi, L., Li, H., & Liu, M. (2019). *Analysis on the Causes of Phonological Fossilization*. 361(Ermm), 167–169.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/ermm-19.2019.33>
- Simon, E. (2005). How native-like do you want to sound? A study of the pronunciation target of advanced learners of English in Flanders. *Moderna Sprak*, 99(1), 12–21.
<https://doi.org/10.58221/mosp.v99i1.9433>
- Sulistiyaningsih, Siti, L., Fasha, M., & Faisol, TPertiwi, Y. (2017). International Seminar on Sociolinguistics and Dialectology: “Changes and Development of Language in Social Life” 2017 Identity, Attitude, and Language Variation. *International Seminar on Sociolinguistics and Dialectology “Changes and Development of Language in Social Life,”* 127–133.
- Trillo, J. R. (2002). The pragmatic fossilization of discourse markers in non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34(6), 769–784. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)00022-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00022-X)
- Yang, S. (2017). *Analysis and Countermeasures for fossilization of Interlanguage*. 21(Icmesd), 154–156.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/icmesd-17.2017.27>
- Zhang, J. (2017). *On the Causation of Lexical Fossilization and Its Countermeasures*. 61(Isss), 517–520.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/iss-17.2017.71>