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ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MOTIVATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: SOME DATA FROM THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of socio-contextual and social psychological elements in second language acquisition in bilingual settings. A total of 139 Spanish L1 secondary school students completed several measures of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks, motivation and Basque and Spanish proficiency. A MANOVA analysis showed that, when compared to a Basque-speaking control group (N = 121), the Spanish-speaking subjects scored significantly lower on all the measures except achievement in Spanish. In addition, structural equation modelling techniques were used to demonstrate the significant effect of socio-contextual and social psychological elements and the articulating role of social networks.

The process of second language acquisition (SLA) presents great diversity and its study is complex for several reasons. SLA can take place in a tutored way in the classroom, in a 'natural' way through the mass media and interaction with native speakers or in mixed settings where instruction and natural exposure are combined. The study of SLA has also been approached from different perspectives because it is affected by a large number of individual and contextual factors. Furthermore, the fact that languages are acquired for different reasons and that there is no general agreement about the meaning of being 'competent' in a second language adds further complexity.

There have been substantial theories and research studies in the educational field concerning the role that individual and educational elements such as age, personality, aptitude, motivation or teaching methods (Stern, 1983; Ellis, 1985; Skehan, 1989; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) play in SLA. Individual differences have also been studied by social psychologists. It is only recently, however, that SLA has been considered as an interpersonal and intergroup phenomenon. As a result of a growing interest in analysing the role of context in situations where the second language is available in the immediate environment, socio-contextual factors such as social networks or the social milieu have become key elements in social psychological models of SLA (Clément, 1980; Hamers & Blanc, 1982; Gardner, 1985; Giles & Coupland, 1991). It has been suggested (Clément, 1980; Giles & Byrne, 1982) that when SLA takes place in a natural environment, and
especially in bilingual settings, the relative status of the two speaking communities and the contact with native speakers are greatly responsible for language acquisition.

Several studies that have related SLA to socio-contextual elements, that is, to the factors present in the environment where SLA takes place (Gardner & Smythe, 1975; d'Anglejean & Renaud, 1985; Clément, 1986; Röhr-Sendlmeier, 1990; Baker, 1992). For example, Clément (1986) demonstrated the influence of the minority vs. majority background on measures of oral proficiency in English as a second language in a study conducted with francophones in Canada. In another study, Röhr-Sendlmeier (1990) found that the improvement of German proficiency was strongly associated with the contact that Turkish children experienced with their German peers. These socio-contextual elements can exert a direct or indirect influence on SLA and have also been related to other social psychological processes such as motivation and attitude (Gardner, 1985; Clément, 1986; Genesee & Bourhis, 1988; Baker, 1992).

The importance of interaction and socio-contextual factors has also been recognised by educationists and applied linguists. Recent methodological proposals underline the idea that language learning is necessarily linked to language use and communicative need (Hatch, 1978; Swain, 1985; Di Pietro, 1987) and several research studies (Burstall, 1978; Wong Fillmore, 1979; Hamers & Deshaies, 1981; Long, 1983) have found that SLA is generally enhanced by exposure to the target language in the environment.

Social Networks, Motivation and SLA

One of the socio-contextual factors that has received growing attention in the field of SLA is that of ethnolinguistic vitality (Clément, 1980; Giles & Byrne, 1982; Landry & Allard, 1990). The construct of ethnolinguistic vitality was proposed by Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977), who define the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group as 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and collective entity within the intergroup setting' (Giles et al., 1977: 308). It was proposed that vitality was linked to the survival of ethnolinguistic groups and that low vitality could be associated with the disappearance of minority groups. The vitality of ethnolinguistic groups can be assessed on three dimensions: status, demography and institutional control. The status variables are those related to the community's economic, social, sociohistorical and language prestige. Demographic variables include the community’s absolute group numbers, their concentration, proportion, birth rate, exogamy/endogamy, immigration and emigration patterns. Institutional control factors refer to the formal and informal representation in the various institutions of a community including the mass media, education, government services, industry, religion, culture and politics.

A subsequent development of ethnolinguistic vitality introduced the concept of subjective vitality (Bourhis, Giles & Rosenthal, 1981) as a social psychological construct that could bridge the gap between sociostructural and psychological factors. It was hypothesised that a group's subjective assessment of ingroup and outgroup ethnolinguistic vitality could determine patterns of intergroup behav-
A number of studies have shown that while some ethnolinguistic groups perceive vitality in a realistic way (Bourhis & Sachdev, 1984; Giles, Rosenthal & Young, 1985; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Kraemer & Olshtain, 1989), others present perceptual distortions in favour of outgroup or ingroup vitality (Giles, Rosenthal & Young, 1985; Young, Bell & Giles, 1988).

The constructs of objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality have been applied to several areas of intergroup behaviour, including SLA. Ethnolinguistic vitality is included in several models of SLA (Giles & Byrne, 1982; Landry & Allard, 1990) although the findings regarding its influence on second language proficiency are still tentative (Labrie & Clément, 1986; Clément, 1986; Gardner et al., 1988).

**Ethnolinguistic Vitality and SLA**

The individual’s social networks also influence his/her perception of ethnolinguistic vitality and SLA, especially in communities where there are native speakers of the second language. The individual’s social network could be defined as ‘the sum of all the interpersonal relations one individual establishes with others over time’ (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). Social networks provide linguistic models and transmit social values, attitudes and perceptions about language (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). It is through the social networks that the child observes linguistic behaviour and develops social representations of languages used in the environment. Individuals also anchor their relationship with other individuals in social networks and mainly through language. The individual’s perceptions of vitality and the development of other social psychological factors such as attitudes and motivation towards learning a second language do not emerge in a social vacuum but are shaped through the individual’s social network. An increase in the use of one particular language in the individual’s network of linguistic contacts is expected to lead to positive appraisals of its vitality (Bourhis, personal communication).

Social networks are very influential in the development of second language proficiency as well as in the maintenance and use of the first language in bilingual communities. Baker (1992) reports that the use of Welsh by family and environmental networks (friends, peer groups) influences language ability in Welsh as well as the attitude towards this language. Other researchers (Genesee, 1985; Hamers & Blanc, 1989; Röhr-Sendlmeier, 1990) have also highlighted the importance of the individual’s social network in SLA.

The social context has also been assumed to be an important determinant of attitudes and motivation towards learning a second language (Gardner, 1985). Gardner refers to motivation as a complex construct containing the following components: attitudes towards learning the language, desire to learn the language and motivational intensity. Attitudes towards learning the language can be understood as the individual’s evaluative reaction to the process of learning a second language; the motivational intensity is the amount of effort the individual expends in order to learn a second language. The desire to learn the language
is related to the positive or negative cognitions the individual has about learning the language.

Motivation is generally considered as one of the main determiners of SLA and its influence has been demonstrated in research studies conducted in different contexts (Skehan, 1989; Gardner & Clément, 1990; Larsen Freeman & Long, 1991). Motivation has also been included in several theoretical models of SLA (Lambert, 1974; Krashen, 1978; Clément, 1980; Gardner, 1985) and its relationship to other individual and contextual variables has been analysed in different contexts (Gardner, 1985; Clément, 1986; Valencia & Cenoz, 1992).

The Present Study

Background

The study of socio-contextual and social psychological elements and their relationship with the acquisition of the Basque language seems especially relevant because of its growing presence in the educational system of the Basque Country. Basque is a language of non-Indo-European origin that has a minority status as a result of its long-standing contact with the dominant languages, Spanish and French. South of the Pyrenees Basque and Spanish are the two official languages of the Basque Autonomous Community and some northern areas of Navarre. The Basque language is spoken by approximately 27% of the population in the Basque Autonomous Community where Spanish is the main vehicle of communication. Historical, political and economic circumstances are mainly responsible for this demographic weakness of Basque within its own territory.

Apart from the fact that Basque has been surrounded by Romance languages, the industrial development of the Basque Country has produced a powerful influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants and urbanisation while the number of inhabitants in Basque-speaking rural areas has decreased in recent years. The Basque language was also excluded from the public domain for many years under the Franco dictatorship and it was not until 1979 that the Basque Autonomous Community obtained the Statute of Autonomy that grants Basque a co-official status with Spanish. Basque is still a threatened language and its weakness lies in what Fishman (1991) considers the basis of transmission: the demographically concentrated family–home–neighbourhood–community sphere. In fact, nowadays speaking Basque equals being bilingual as Basque native and non-native speakers are also competent in Spanish, the dominant language of the Basque Autonomous Community.

Basque and Spanish are compulsory subjects in all schools in the Basque Autonomous Community and they can both be languages of instruction. Basque and Spanish native speakers can choose to have Spanish as the language of instruction (Model A), Basque (Model D) or Basque and Spanish (Model B). Instruction in Spanish is declining and preference for those models which stress the minority language has experienced an important increase in recent years both among Basque and Spanish native speakers (Artigal, 1993). Instruction in Basque
has been associated with higher levels of competence in the Basque language while competence in Spanish presents homogeneous levels for students instructed in either language (Cummins, 1989). Even native speakers of Basque from Basque-using families acquire a high level of competence in Spanish through social interaction and the mass media in their school years, when they also study Spanish as a subject.

Goals and hypotheses

The present study was designed to analyse the role of socio-contextual and social psychological elements in SLA in the Basque Country. We were also interested in finding the differences between groups of speakers of Basque and of Spanish in the Basque Autonomous Community regarding Basque and Spanish proficiency, in/outgroup ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks and motivation to learn Basque. Regarding the comparison between these two groups and according to theoretical proposals and research findings already described the following hypotheses were formulated.

First Hypothesis

The Basque and Spanish groups are expected to differ in their perception of ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks, motivation and achievement in Basque. Each group is expected to present positive appraisals of its own vitality and the Basque group will present stronger motivation for learning the Basque language and a higher presence of Basque in their social networks. The Basque and Spanish groups are expected to show differences in Basque language achievement but not in Spanish.

Furthermore, the following hypothesis was formulated regarding the role of these socio-contextual and social psychological elements when Basque is acquired as a second language.

Second Hypothesis

Ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks and motivation will influence Basque language achievement. The socio-contextual and social psychological elements will be related to each other and the social networks will achieve a relevant role articulating different elements and second language achievement.

Method

Subjects

260 secondary school students from the Basque Autonomous Community participated in this study. The students were divided into two groups: the Basque group and the Spanish one. The Basque group (N = 121) comprised Basque-speaking students who are native speakers of Basque and also have Basque as their language of instruction. All the subjects in the Spanish-speaking group (N = 139) have Spanish as their first language and Spanish is also their language of instruction. A large proportion of the subjects in this Spanish group (67.9%) are children of immigrants who came to the Basque Country in the 60s and 70s. The
four schools selected for this study are located in four areas that vary in their proportions of Basque-speaking inhabitants. The schools in this study are state dual track schools and offer instruction in two languages, Basque and Spanish, although instruction in Spanish is still the most popular option at the secondary level in the Basque Autonomous Community. The schools selected for this study were academically oriented and are quite representative regarding language programmes and social class mix. Although all the students in the classrooms responded to the questionnaires only those students whose L1 was the same as their language of instruction were selected for the present research.

Spanish and Basque are compulsory school subjects for all the students in the Basque Autonomous Community. The L2 is generally taught through its own medium and students with different languages of instruction are never mixed in the classroom. Basque L1 students instructed in Basque usually demonstrate high levels of proficiency in Spanish, the dominant language in the community, even though they only study Spanish as a school subject for 3–5 hours a week. Spanish L1 students instructed in Spanish also study Basque for 3–5 hours a week but tend to achieve low levels of competence in this language (Olaziregi & Sierra, 1989, 1990).

The students participating in this study were between 16 and 19 years of age. Approximately 70% of the subjects of the 16–19 age cohort in the Basque Autonomous Community are still at school either attending academic or technically oriented courses. The Basque group comprised 43 males and 75 females and the Spanish group comprised 39 males and 99 females. All the schools were mixed and the fact that there are more female than male students in both groups reflects the proportion of female students in academically oriented courses in the Basque Autonomous Community.

Measuring Instruments

Students answered a battery of questionnaires including the following measures:

1. Background information. A questionnaire containing items relating to sex, age and socioeconomic status was used to obtain background information.

2. Ethnolinguistic vitality. The subjective ethnolinguistic vitality was measured via the 'Subjective Vitality Questionnaire' developed by Bourhis et al. (1981). This questionnaire, which measures the perception of in/outgroup vitality on the status, demographic and institutional support dimensions, was translated and adapted into Basque and Spanish. The participants from the two groups had to evaluate the vitality of the Basque and Spanish communities in the Basque Autonomous Community on the three subscales: status, demography and institutional support.

Two factor analyses, using a varimax rotation criterion, were carried out on the three subscales of Basque and Spanish ethnolinguistic vitality and only one factor was found in each of the analyses. The factor for Basque ethnolinguistic vitality accounted for 72.8% of the variance and the factor for Spanish vitality for
70%. Regarding reliability, the Alfa coefficient for the Basque version was 0.88 and 0.85 for the Spanish version.

(3) Social networks. The social networks were assessed via a questionnaire, which included items about the knowledge of Basque in the subject’s social networks: family, relatives, friends, classmates, neighbours, leisure, culture and sports companions. The participants had to rate the competence in Basque of their associates on a 9-point scale (1 = nobody; 9 = all). A factor analysis, using a varimax rotation criterion, was carried out on the different measures of social networks and two factors were found which accounted for 73.9% of the variance. The first factor ‘community networks’ accounts for 46.3% of the variance and includes the following measures: friends, classmates, neighbours, leisure, culture and sport companions. The second factor, the ‘family networks’ factor, accounts for 27.6% of the variance and includes the nuclear and extended family measures. The Alfa coefficient for this questionnaire was 0.80.

(4) Motivation. This variable integrates the three components of the motivational construct proposed by Gardner (1985): attitudes towards learning Basque, desire to learn Basque and motivational intensity. The questionnaires to measure motivation were taken from Gardner (1985:179–182) and translated into Basque and Spanish. A factor analysis, using a varimax rotation criterion, was carried out on the three measures of motivation and only one factor was found which accounted for 80.2% of the variance. The Alfa coefficient for the motivation index was 0.80.

(5) Tests of Basque and Spanish. The linguistic tests of Basque and Spanish were identical for the two groups and had two parts. In the first one the participants were asked to evaluate their own competence in the two languages on 5-point scales (1 = none; 5 = very good) that corresponded to the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The students also completed two cloze tests, one in Basque and another in Spanish.

Two factor analyses, using a varimax rotation criterion, were performed on the five scores of Basque and Spanish language achievement and only one factor was found in each of the analyses. The factor for Basque accounted for 53.1% of the variance of the variance and the factor for Spanish for 70%.

Procedure

The participants attending four schools in the Basque Country were asked to complete the questionnaires and to take the Basque and Spanish language tests during their school timetable in Spring 1992. The students could choose to answer the questionnaires either in Basque or Spanish, but they all had to take both the Basque and the Spanish cloze tests. Although all the participants were given the questionnaires in Basque and Spanish they all chose to fill them in their first language. All the students in the different classrooms answered the tests that were administered by the researchers.
Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the effect of socio-contextual and social psychological factors on the acquisition of Basque as a second language and to examine the differences between the Basque and the Spanish groups. A MANOVA analysis was performed to analyse the differences between the Basque and the Spanish group regarding the socio-contextual and social psychological factors and to test the first hypothesis. Then a path analysis was used to test the main hypothesis regarding the acquisition of Basque as a second language by the Spanish group.

The Basque and the Spanish groups

The results of the ONEWAY analyses of variance shown in Table 1 demonstrated that there were no significant differences between the Basque and the Spanish group regarding socioeconomic status (F (1, 260) = 1.49, p = 0.22) and age (F (1, 260) = 0.64, p = 0.42). Similarly, a X-square analysis proved that there were no significant differences between the two groups regarding the variable sex (F (1, 260) = 1.95, p = 0.16). Therefore, as far as the background variables are concerned, the Basque and Spanish groups are quite similar.

Table 1 Comparison of groups on background variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spanish Group</th>
<th>Basque Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ses</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>16.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No significant differences

Then a MANOVA analysis was performed in order to control for the Spanish group’s scores on the socio-contextual and social psychological variables as well as for their proficiency in Basque and Spanish. A general effect of the independent variable group membership was found for the socio-contextual, social psychological and language variables (Trace = 0.8364, F(10, 260) = 95.62, p < 0.001. The results concerning the univariate effects show the important differences between the two groups regarding all the independent variables except achievement in Spanish.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Results in Table 2 show the ethnolinguistic vitality attributed to Basque by the Basque and the Spanish groups for the three subscales: status, demography and institutional control. The Basque group has a more positive appraisal of its own vitality than the Spanish group and the univariate effects are significant for the three components of ethnolinguistic vitality: status (F = 10.01, p = 0.002); demography (F = 33.18, p < 0.001) and institutional control (F = 23.69, p < 0.001).
Table 2 Group differences: MANOVA results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions measured</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Respondents' L1</th>
<th>Max. Poss</th>
<th>Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Basque</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnolinguistic vitality</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demography</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional control</td>
<td>Basque</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>Basque</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basque</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>108.0</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

The results pertaining to the ethnolinguistic vitality also show that the Spanish group also favours its own group vitality and that the differences between the means of the two groups are significant for the three components: status (F = 82.21, p < 0.001), demography (F = 48.39, p < 0.001) and institutional control (F = 58.23, p < 0.001).

The results show that each group presents a more positive appraisal of its own vitality and that there is more agreement between the two groups when assessing the three components of the vitality of the Basque ethnolinguistic group and the demography and status of Spanish than when the institutional control of Spanish is considered.

Social Networks and Motivation

The results shown in Table 2 demonstrate that the Basque group presents a higher level of competence in Basque in their social networks and more motivation towards learning their own language. The Spanish group presents a much lower competence in Basque in their social networks (F = 458.25, p < 0.001) and although the differences in motivation are not as large, the univariate effect is also significant for this variable (F = 33.41, p < 0.001).

Achievement in Basque and Spanish

The results of the MANOVA analysis also show that there are important differences between the scores that the Spanish subjects have in Basque and
Spanish. Subjects from the Basque group achieve higher scores in the Basque tests but their scores in Spanish are nearly as high as those of the Spanish group. The Basque and Spanish groups present significant differences in Basque language achievement ($F = 645.79, p < 0.001$) but not in Spanish ($F = 2.48, p = 0.116$).

**Structural equation for SLA**

In order to test the second hypothesis, only the subjects from the Spanish group ($N = 139$), that is, those who are native speakers of Spanish and learn Basque as a second language, were included in the subsequent analyses. The factor scores for Basque ethnolinguistic vitality, motivation, 'community networks' and Basque language were used in these analyses. As these subjects use Spanish at home, only the measure for ‘community networks’, including friends, classmates, neighbours, leisure culture and sport companions was used. A factor analysis, using a varimax rotation criterion, was carried out on these measures of ‘community networks’ and only one factor was found which accounted for 69% of the variance. The Alfa coefficient for ‘community networks’ was 0.85.

First, the correlations among the sociostructural, social psychological and linguistic variables were calculated. The pattern of correlations in Table 3 shows that the variables in the study are related to each other. The table also shows that the correlation between ethnolinguistic vitality and motivation is appreciably higher than the correlation between ethnolinguistic vitality and the other variables. The table also shows the strength of the correlation between motivation and Basque language achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Basque Ethn. Vit.</th>
<th>Motiv.</th>
<th>Social networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>0.562**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>0.295**</td>
<td>0.373**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque language</td>
<td>0.194*</td>
<td>0.443**</td>
<td>0.323**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* < 0.05; **p** < 0.01

To further examine the influence of socio-contextual and social psychological elements in Basque language acquisition, structural equation modelling using EQS (Bentler, 1989) was used to test the fit of the proposed model of Basque language acquisition (Figure 1). EQS calculates the goodness of fit by means of the $X^2$ statistic. The program shows the parameters (path coefficients) of the structural model and by producing the goodness of fit $X^2$ evaluates if the causal model fits the data. A non-significant chi-square, $X^2 (1,139) = 1.177, p = 0.27$, was obtained and all the paths proposed in the analysis were significant. This indicates that the model fits the data and can be accepted.

According to the model Basque language achievement is determined by two variables: motivation (0.375) and social networks (0.183). Furthermore, the path linking ethnolinguistic vitality to motivation shows that the effect of ethno-
Motivation

Ethnolinguistic Vitality

.495

.227

.295

Social Networks

Basque Achievement

.375

.183

Figure 1. The acquisition of Basque as a second language (chi-square = 1.77; DF = 1; p = 0.27797; Bentler normed fit index = 0.988; Bentler non-normed fit index = 0.989)

Ethnolinguistic vitality on Basque language acquisition is mediated by motivation. The model shows that ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks and motivation influence Basque language achievement. The effect of ethnolinguistic vitality is indirect and mediated by motivation that has a direct influence on Basque achievement. The model also shows the articulating role played by social networks that influence ethnolinguistic vitality, motivation and Basque language acquisition. Social networks affect Basque language achievement both directly and indirectly through ethnolinguistic vitality and motivation.

Discussion

The results of the MANOVA analysis confirm our first hypothesis because they show that there are significant differences between the Spanish and the Basque groups regarding the perception of Basque and Spanish ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks, motivation to learn Basque and achievement in Basque.

The Spanish group presents similar assessments for the ethnolinguistic vitality of Basque and Spanish on the three subscales, while the Basque group presents important differences with regard to the perception of Basque and Spanish ethnolinguistic vitality, appraising the vitality of Basque more positively than that of Spanish. The profile of ethnolinguistic vitality presented here seems to be characterised by perceptual distortions in favour of Basque vitality. The Spanish group attenuates the differences between the majority and the minority ethnolinguistic groups and the Basque group elevates its own vitality above that of the majority group.

The results of the MANOVA analysis also show that the presence of Basque speakers in the social networks varies according to group membership. As the
subjects in the Basque group have experienced their early socialisation in Basque and Basque is also their language of instruction it is not surprising to find that their score on Basque social networks is significantly higher than the score of their Spanish peers. The Basque group also gets a significantly higher score than the Spanish group on the motivation scale. Although the content of the Basque compulsory classes attended by all the subjects in this sample differs according to the language of instruction, the members of the Basque group are more motivated to continue learning Basque than the majority language students who have to learn the minority language.

When comparing their achievement in Basque and Spanish our hypothesis is also confirmed because there are significant differences between the Basque and the Spanish groups in Basque but not in Spanish. While it is not surprising to find that Basque native speakers present a higher competence in their first language than Spanish native speakers for whom Basque is a second language, the results concerning Spanish are much more interesting because they show the influence that context can exert on language acquisition. Even though the subjects in the Basque group come from Basque-speaking families and have received the same amount of formal instruction in Spanish as the members of the Spanish group in Basque, their command of their second language is not significantly lower than that of Spanish native speakers who have received all their instruction in Spanish.

Even though only a few of the large number of individual and contextual factors that influence SLA have been considered in this study, the results of the structural equation model confirm our hypothesis regarding the acquisition of Basque as a second language. The three elements included in the model, ethnolinguistic vitality, social networks and motivation, affect success in SLA in a direct or indirect way. Furthermore, social networks emerge as the element that articulates the relationships among ethnolinguistic vitality, motivation and second language achievement and influences Basque language acquisition directly and indirectly.

The Spanish-speaking subjects experienced their primary socialisation process in the majority language under the influence of their Spanish-speaking social networks and these networks transmitted to them their linguistic values and models. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that, living in the Basque Country, they have always been aware of other models of language behaviour different from those presented by family networks. Social networks widen when children get older and go to school and as Hamers & Blanc (1989) suggest, the acquisition of the minority language is very much dependent on the contact the children have with this language in their social networks.

The presence of Basque in the Spanish child’s ‘community networks’ will strongly affect his/her success in SLA for several reasons. The Spanish subject’s Basque-speaking friends, classmates, sports or cultural group peers will act as models of behaviour that transmit their values and will affect the Spanish subject’s evaluation of his/her mother tongue vis-à-vis the minority language. These new values adopted by the Spanish subject and his/her awareness of the use of Basque in everyday communication could positively change his/her
appraisal of Basque ethnolinguistic vitality. Furthermore, the influence of peer groups can be especially relevant in the adolescent’s perception of reality and adoption of models of behaviour. The role of the social and cultural contexts in the development of attitudes and motivation is also widely recognised by SLA theoreticians and researchers (Gardner, 1985; Ellis, 1985; Spolsky, 1989; Baker, 1992, 1993). The Spanish subject’s Basque networks and the value he/she attributes to the Basque language will, therefore, trigger off the subject’s motivation to learn Basque and motivation will influence Basque language acquisition. The frequent interaction in Basque in the Spanish subject’s environment will also favour Basque language acquisition because the Basque networks provide opportunities to acquire the language in an informal way and to merge this acquisition with formal instruction.

The role of social networks on SLA also have important pedagogic implications. The results achieved in Basque by Spanish-speaking subjects instructed in Spanish are generally very poor (Euskal Irakaskuntza, 1990) after several years of instruction. The relevant role of social networks shows that it is necessary not only to improve the instruction in Basque but also to find ways in which Basque is used for leisure and cultural activities.

The present study confirms the importance of the contact between linguistic communities and the role of socio-contextual and social psychological factors in SLA. Language and context are interdependent and the study of SLA cannot exclude the analysis of the circumstances of the ethnolinguistic groups in which it occurs. The understanding of the complex process of SLA not only requires the analysis of individual characteristics but also the integration of contextual processes as well as the relationships among the different elements that affect success in second language development.

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References


