

Conference Paper

Modelling a Here-and-Now Approach in Building Linguistic Capital

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Abstract

Research findings in language acquisition and language and education show that there is a close link between cognition and academic language development. Children who have acquired and or learned academic language in their first language, they are likely to benefit cognitively more in their education than those who have not. As a consequence, the latter group may be the risk of becoming cognitively stagnant in their future education. These researchers advocate that the use of first language as an instructional language is not only educationally compulsory but also is a part of their rights. To them, teaching in children's first language is a way of building what is in this paper called linguistic capital. However, the question of how this formation has to be executed and related issues including but not restricted to what appropriate resources would be needed to enable the formation to happen still remain to be seen. This paper therefore has a two-fold aim. Firstly, this paper intends to provide a theoretical apparatus for building linguistic capital. Secondly, it also aims to present some possible resources for building linguistic capital. As a preliminary work, this paper is then expected to be an invitation for further discussions and or debates on the issue.

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1. Introduction

This paper aims at advocating the importance of building linguistic capital at early stage in children's education. It particularly intends to make functions of first language-more meaningful. First language intended in this paper refers to first language that is acquired by a person which is the similar sense of the second definition of mother tongue of Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989). From now on first language and mother tongue will be referred to with L1. In order for L1 to be more beneficial for the its users, L1 must be understood in the broader scope not only restricted to cultural and political functions as has been dubbed but also to include socio-economic functions, which, in the author's view, have been neglected so far. However, how this inclusive view may be understood, explicated in practical terms and applied in practical manners is not an easy task. Therefore, a theoretical framework and appropriate resources may be needed in order for us to be able to offer a solid foundation for executing the program. This paper intends to fill this gap. In section 2, conceptual bases for linguistic

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capital building followed by resources for building linguistic capital discussed in section 3. Conclusion will be made in section 4.

1.1. Conceptual Bases for Linguistic Capital Building

1.1.1. Language Acquisition

In this section, I would like to draw some lights from Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) to situate language proficiency and academic achievements evidenced from several studies. I will then relate these cases to Papuan contexts. Before doing so, I would like to briefly summarize the nature of language acquisition. Language is a gift unique to human as Chomsky states "language is a species specific human possession"(Chomsky, 2006, p. 9), and "the ability to acquire and use language is a species specific human capacity"(Chomsky, 2006, p. 90). As indicated above, effortlessly a child may be able to acquire a language and becomes a native speaker of it. This is the reason generativists call it innate. However, if this innate quality exists it must be activated by other factors in order for the acquisition to take place.

Two factors that condition the activation of the innate quality are briefly referred to here. The first factor is physiological. As language input is received, brain adaptation including elasticity and lateralization takes place which in turn facilitates the language acquisition process (Curtiss, 1985; Lenneberg, 1969; Tzourio-Mazoyer et al., 2010). Some language acquisition experts have correlated physical changes with age factor and proposed what is now called critical period hypothesis (CPH).

CPH predicts that there is a critical period for language acquisition. If exposure to a language is after puberty, language would not be fully acquired (Johnson & Newport, 1989, 1991; Lenneberg, 1969). However, it is debated on the strong view that argues that after CPH ends no acquisition takes place. The critics say that there are individuals who could be able acquire a language after puberty (Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley, 2003). In other words, the best time for language acquisition is before the completion of physical maturity, no sudden drop at certain age. The physical maturity may be called internal factor.

If language is innate as generativists claim to be (Chomsky, 1980), then it must be activated by some external factor, sociocultural aspect. A child must be exposed to a language if she is to acquire language; otherwise s/he would not be able to acquire the language. Genie, a 13 years old girl, who was isolated and found, is an example. She could not achieve native level English (Curtiss, Krashen, Fromkin, Rigler, & Rigler, 1973). This shows that a human child is born in social world, grows and develops as a social being and it is in this world that the child is exposed to language (Clark, 2009, p. 21) and becomes a native speaker of that language.

1.1.2. Cognitive and Academic Language Development

In the previous section, two factors that condition language acquisition were considered. In there, it was said that if a child is not exposed to a language before physical

maturation completes, s/he would not be able to fully acquire the language. This language acquisition (or learning), according to James Cummins is of two kinds, namely "surface fluency" and academic related language "conceptual linguistic knowledge" (Cummins, 1979b). Later he termed them with Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) respectively (Cummins, 1979a) respectively. BICS is context-embedded communication which is used more in everyday interactions while CALP is context-reduced one which is used in academic settings (Cummins, 1984).

The distinction was made based on the classic study of Finn's immigrant children in Sweden who seemed to be able to engage in daily conversations with peers and family but their academic performance was poor (Skutnab-Kangas & Toukomaa, 1976). In other words, the children lacked CALP which in turn caused the low performance. Therefore, Cummins suggests that children should develop CALP in their L1. When CALP is built in their L1, the strategies used to develop CALP in L1 can aid acquiring CALP in L2 because both L1 and L2 share a common underlying proficiency (CUP). CUP theory claims that "experience with either language can promote development of the proficiency underlying both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both either in school or in the wider environment" (Cummins, 1984, p. 25). Conditions necessary for this to take place are adequate motivation and exposure. In other words, the students receive enough exposure along with other conditions necessary for the acquisition and or learning to take place.

2. A Here-and-Now Approach in Building Linguistic Capital

2.1. Conceptual Definitions

The program offered here is called building linguistic capital. Linguistic capital is intended in this paper is linguistic competence (that is both BICS and CALP) that enables one to be actively involved in society. To execute the program advocated here, we need an approach that is more relevant and socio-culturally supportive one. In this paper, '*the here-and-now approach*' is used. The concept of 'here-and-now' was initially used by Stephen Krashen. It refers to the caregiver's manner of communicating with the child s/he take cares of where the caregiver talks to the child about what may easily be perceived by the child, what is in the immediate environment (Krashen, 1982). The concept intended in this paper is a modified and extended version of 'here-and-now' approach. The approach includes resources that is available nearby the school location.

2.2. Resources for Linguistic Capital Building

In this section, some resources for building linguistic capital are discussed.

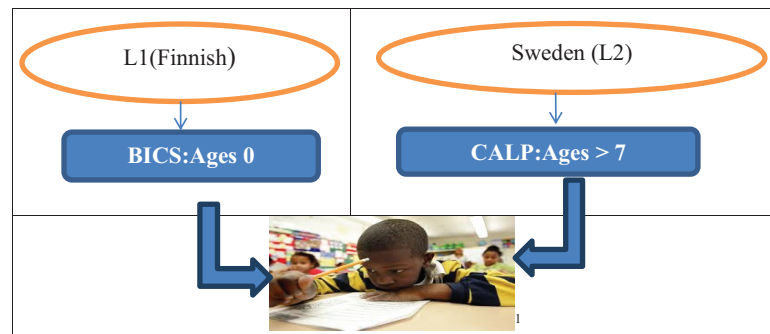


Figure 1: Acquiring BICS in Finnish and learning CALP in Swedish. (The picture was retrieved on 12 November 2015 from <https://www.google.co.id/search?biw=1366&bih=657&noj=1&tbm=isch&sa=1&btnG=Search&q=a+student#btnG=Search&imgsrc=F6Z6u6TDM6b7eM{%}3A.>)

2.2.1. Language

The language that has been acquired by the child is her/his L1. It is the one that s/he hears when she is born and grows with it. So it is one that makes the child feel attached to the family who s/he lives with. Therefore when s/he is forced to talk about things in a language that s/he is unfamiliar with s/he may be uncomfortable or even feel embarrassed. In short, it is her/his L1 that is first available to the student. The child is exposed to L1 from 0 up to 7 years old. S/he is accustomed with the language communicated in the family. S/he starts going to school by the age of 7.

If their instructional language is other than L1 of the students, it is likely that this situation affects the children's academic achievement. This was reflected in the study of Skutnab-Kangas and Toukomma referred to above. L1 of the subjects was Finnish, which they acquired since birth and their L2, which was also their instructional language, was Swedish. This model is diagrammed in Figure 1.

In the case of Swedish schools, exposure was abundantly available because the study was in peripheral down to city. One reason was that the CALP was not built in Finnish (L1). In the context of Papua, not only instruction is done in L2 (Indonesian in this case) but also exposure to the instructional language is almost none particularly in the Highlands, remote and isolated areas. This indicates that education situation in Papua is worse than that of the Finns in Sweden or others cases in North America (Canada and USA) or Asia.

After reviewing research papers on the minority education, Cummins concludes that children's failure must have been caused by such case as the one diagrammed above. He states that

"One reason why language minority students have often failed to develop high levels of academic skills is because their initial instruction has emphasized context-reduced communication, since instruction has been through English and unrelated to their prior out-of-school experiences (Cummins, 1984, p. 28)".

This suggests that since the students' first exposure to language is context-embedded, the classes have to start with context-embedded interaction. In the same way, since their L1 had been Finnish, their instructional language should have been in that language not in Swedish. This view is diagrammed in Figure 2.

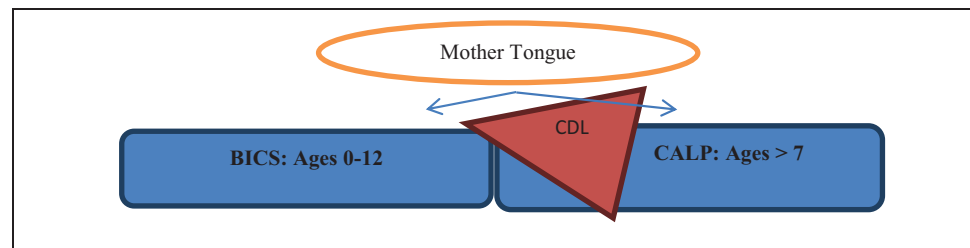


Figure 2: Acquiring BICS and learning CALP L1.

As shown in Figure 2, the children build BICS in L1 and they continue with CALP in L1 too. CDL in the red triangle means cognitively demanding language. Children may acquire cognitively demanding language in pre-school period but not much as that after age 7.

Several studies show that academic achievement was good when instructional language was L1 as in Thailand (Siltragool, Petcharugsa, & Chouenon, 2009), in Cambodia (Siren, 2009) and in Philippines (Quijano & Eustaquio, 2009). It has also shown that native speakers of Papuan Malay (PM) found easy to understand mathematical concepts and formulas in PM than when taught in standard Indonesian (L2) (Kocu, 2015).

2.2.2. Community

The language the child uses has been acquired by living with the people who speak that language. Therefore, the society whose children are being educated needs to be involved in the education program. Story centres may be opened where the children hear stories, make jokes/humors, tell their stories in their language in an environment that is casual and informal. Stories may be about their pasts, legends and fable, environment, social and cultural related stories, and others. Elders in the community are the ones who are authority in terms of mastery of language and social cultural aspects necessary for the language to exist. Therefore, it is them who should lead the story time centers in the school location.

2.2.3. Teachers

Bilingual teachers of mother tongue and mainstream language must be trained. Teachers for such classes should be native speakers of the language but who also have good commands in all skills and components in the mainstream language. Enough training packages for teachers both pre-service and in-service need to be allocated.

2.2.4. Curriculum

Curriculum should be one that is modified version of the national one. Nationally required subjects may be developed using materials that are locally available. Making garden techniques used by the local people may be used to introduce the concept of agriculture. Boats may be used to introduce transportations. Civil engineering may be

introduced with how to make traditional bridges. The students may be familiarized with how traditional houses are built to introduce architecture. While we can conveniently go on and on with others, these examples could suffice to illustrate the idea intended here.

2.2.5. Library

Language related resources should amply be provided. These resources include descriptive works on the language such as grammar, dictionaries, encyclopedias, bible translation, stories and songs including graded readers designed based on level of difficulty, and so forth. Technical dictionaries or encyclopedias should be provided. These resources contain loan words which are modified and adapted according to pronunciation norms acceptable in the language. What have been presented in this section are those that are exemplary aspects which may be expanded if deemed necessary for building what is in this paper called linguistic capital.

3. Conclusion

This paper has argued for the model of instruction that is illustrated in Figure 2. Linguistic capital may be built when all the resources are fully functioned as they ought to be. By developing BICS and CALP in L1, it is expected that it would reduce so much burden that are normally faced by the reversed model of instructions as is implemented in Papua.

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