IMPLICATIONS OF THIRD CULTURE KIDS (TCK)'S SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON LANGUAGE IDENTITY - AN EXPLORATION

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The Third Culture Kid (TCK); is the term used to describe individuals whose formative years are spent outside their origin's culture. A TCK is defined as an individual whose sense of belonging is not specified to any particular culture for their self-definition. This paper will be looking at the effects of English learning as the second (L2) and/or foreign (FL) language on the establishment of language and cultural identity in Third Culture Kid (TCK). The target group selected in this paper is specifically the TCKs from non-native English speaking background. The aspects to be explored are the impact of L2/FL on native language (L1) in general, and then delving deeper into the effects of English as the L2/FL on the TCKs' L1 specifically. The paper will also be discussing the process of language identity formation in the TCKs with respect to English learning, the construction of these students' cultural identity, and the role of teachers as cultural mediators in the classroom for this particular cohort. The theoretical framework for the analysis on the cultural aspect will be using the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions structure as a reference.

Keywords: Third Culture Kid (TCK), L2, identity, socio-cultural

INTRODUCTION

The Third Culture Kid; is the term thought up by Useem (1963, 1976); as cited by Langford (2001), and Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) to describe individuals whose formative years are spent outside their origin's culture. Pollock (1998); as cited by Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) characterized a TCK as an individual whose sense of belonging is not specified to any particular culture for their self-definition. They, in most cases, belong exclusively to neither the parents' nor the foreign/host country's culture. The best description of the group's identity is the self-establishment of a 'personalised' cultural niche as their cultural persona; that is a hybrid of both native/passport/home and host country's cultures. The unique 'personalised' outcome is a result of the assimilation, adaptation and adoption of both cultural sources; hence the Third Place dimension.

Bilingualism and/or multiculturalism is often observed in the group (Silva, 2021). Studies on TCKs in relation to language learning often explores on some of the following factors; L1 and L2 relationship and usage, age of introduction to L2, L2's level and frequency of exposure (Kaipa and Kaipa, 2022).

This paper will be looking at the effects of English learning as the second (L2) and/or foreign language (FL) on the establishment of language and cultural identity in Third Culture Kids (TCKs). The aspects to be explored are the impact of L2/FL on native language (L1) in general, and then delving deeper into the effects of English as the L2/FL on the TCK's L1 specifically. The paper will also be discussing the process of language identity formation in TCKs with respect to English learning, the construction of these students' cultural identity, and the role of teachers as cultural mediators in the classroom for this particular cohort. The theoretical framework for the analysis on the cultural aspect will be using the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions structure as a reference.

METHODOLOGY

The target group selected in this paper is specifically the TCKs of Malaysian origin, with non-native English speaking background, and had stayed in Australia for 5 years. The study cases presented in this paper are based on the interviews conducted. The names of the subjects used in this paper are pseudonyms, for privacy and confidentiality purposes.

Instrument

Qualitative approach is used in this study, complimented with literature review. The interviews were conducted individually using semi-constructed format, that allowed the subjects to narrate their personal experience freely with descriptions using their own terms.

Sampling

The selection of the particular subjects is constructed on purposive sampling, based on the following criteria/background:
1. Non-native English speaker.
2. Nationality identified as Malaysian on passport.
3. Has lived in Australia for 5 years.

Three subjects are selected based on the criteria, to explore on the different types and circumstances of the TCKs' immersions and moulds.

RESULTS

Case Summaries

'A'; an 8-year old girl who is the daughter of a diplomat. She was born in a Malay family whose native language is Bahasa Malaysia. Shortly after her birth, the family relocated from Malaysia to the Czech Republic for three years before being relocated again to Australia. Her current main language of communication is English, due to the upbringing of attending international schools while moving between countries. Despite her parents using Bahasa Malaysia in half of the conversation at home, she unconsciously adapted English as the language that she identified herself by. English was the main medium of instruction (MOI) being used to communicate while socializing (with friends, at schools, doing errands) with the locals and other international children and their families while living in the diplomatic hubs. The amount of English exposure exceeded the amount of time spent for her to get acquainted with her native tongue at home. She now could barely speak Bahasa Malaysia, even though she could still understand the spoken language to some extent.

The scenario however was different in her older brother's case; 'B'. Eleven years older than her, he could still understand and converse in Bahasa Malaysia (even not to a proficient level by Malaysian standard). The difference was that he lived in Malaysia while he was

growing up before reaching adolescent age, prior to the relocation to the other two host countries. Hence, his L1 language system framework was more developed than his sister's.

'C'; a non-native English speaker whose first language is Bahasa Malaysia, and learned to speak English from school; which the national English subject syllabus follows the British English system. Her English speaking and listening exposure however were mostly from the American English that dominated the media. Her spoken English before coming to Australia was best described as Malay-accented English with a tinge of American English (in pronunciation). The British English was only illustrated in her written presentations (spelling-wise). The first thing that she learnt when first arrived in Australia was that an immediate intervention was needed for her to survive here, as she was barely understood. More often than not, the locals could not understand her due to the foreign accent and pronunciation. One of the most common problems was the locals mistaking the 'a' as 'e', and it was especially frustrating when trying to spell her name. Over the 5 years living in Australia, she unconsciously adapted the 'native' way of speaking like the locals, pulling and exaggerating on the 'a' into an 'ay' to be understood. Not to mention the routine use of '*no worries*' , '*cheers'*, and '*you're right'* in daily conversations. The new formation of habits helped her to get by and be more comfortable in speaking with the locals. It became an interesting point when her friends back in Malaysia commented that she is now speaking with an Australian accent, because she is not quite actively conscious of the acquisition and assimilation process.

DISCUSSION
The Effects of L2/FL on L1 (Native Language)
Van Els (1986) as cited by Porte (2003) reported his findings on the occurrences of language attrition and eradication involving the L1 and L2. He classified the situations into four categories; L1 erosion in its native setting, L1 erosion in target language (L2) setting, L2 erosion in L1 setting, and L2 erosion in its native setting. The category that is most relevant to the paper's discussion is the second one; L1 erosion in an L2 setting. Porte (2003) described this category as either the loss of the native language due to extended residence overseas, or the abolition of a dialect outside the setting where the dialect is used; based on Val Els research.

Olshtain and Barzilay (1991), Major (1992), as cited by Porte stated that the rate of L1 erosion is directly proportional to the span of time spent away from one's home country. It shows that the diminishing maintenance and practice of the L1 and the increasing exposure towards the L2 lead to the native language erosion, especially in younger learners where the plasticity of brain function is still highly malleable compared to adult learners. New imprints are easily made and old marks are easily erased, and it apparently applies to the innate language system as well. Code-switching and mixing between the two languages also affect the correct construction of language framework in learners.

English; being the current lingua-franca of the world, has the most appeal as the selected L2/FL to be acquired by most TCKs who are non-native English-speaker. This is due to the nature of the language that acts as the global passport that allows 'entrance' and 'acceptance' for communication in most parts of the world. Another factor is that most international schools worldwide use English as the main medium of instruction (MOI). Hence, it is not surprising that most TCKs adopt English as their new language of identity; following the L1 erosion, because it is the most convenient option.

Building The Foundation of Language Identity

It is inevitable that the vital construction of a language identity is somehow influenced by the necessity of being understood. Most TCKs acquire the 'form' of English (accent, colloquialism, slang, humour) that is closest to the host-country's native quality, or in some circumstances, the type of English that is most used in their daily life (classroom, school, social circle, family, et cetera). A Filipino TCK living in the diplomat hub of Delhi (India) and enrolled in the local American Embassy School for example will most probably acquire American English versus acquiring the British English or the Indian English.

Another perspective in looking at the establishment of one's language identity, specifically in this case, is on how does a learner determine which English is the 'correct' English that they can identify to, with regard to the influence of global technological development. It is notable to look into the role of technology and media in shaping this form of language identity. The SIRI (Speech Interpretation and Recognition Interface) technology is a prime example. SIRI is widely known as speech recognition software used in the iPhone models; 4S onwards, and the third generation iPads onwards. The initial release was accompanied by Apple's official statement that the software could recognize English from the U.S.A., United Kingdom, and Australia, as well as French and German. (http://www.apple.com, 2012; http://www.macstories.net ,2011; http://www.idownloadblog.com , 2011; http://forums.appleinsider.com , 2011) During its first release in 2011, complaints had been reported by users outside the United States of America (and even by users within the country) that the software was not compatible to some English accents. Complaints from http://www.idownloadblog.com archives stated that SIRI did not understand 'heavy accents'. A discussion forum on Apple's official site in 2011 has reported complaints from users with accents of Indian, Filipino, New Zealand, Spanish, Scottish, and Russian origin (and even users from Pennsylvania and the South) had difficulties with SIRI (https://discussions.apple.com , 2011).

The point to be highlighted here is the key of 'survival'. It is a 'survival' mechanism where the language user adapts the local/native features to be understood and to survive the situation. A user on the Apple's troubleshoot forum complained that SIRI did not understand his wife's Filipino accent. He then later posted on the discussion thread that his wife's iPhone's SIRI was becoming more 'cooperative' after some time. Another user then asked whether SIRI's speech recognition's AI got used to the wife's Filipino accent, or did she try speaking in an American accent. The thread has not been replied. However, it still shows an interesting perspective on how the 'survival' mechanism kicks in, and giving an impact on one's language identity without the person being aware of the changes. The kind of phenomena with the likes of SIRI's technology somehow can create a global ripple effect in determining the 'acceptable' English; one that can get us by. Considering the vastness of the smartphones market nowadays (SIRI technology is now available on other smartphones as well, not just exclusively with iPhones), it is not unexpected to see the global end-users being 'shaped' to fit into the required language mould. Case in point, the global cultural climate can somehow overcome the influence of L2 environment in establishing one's language identity. An Egyptian living in Texas, who speaks English like a native complete with its signature Texas twang for example, might want to alter his accent to fit the functional standard of English to operate SIRI. Sooner or later, the newly formed practice will be fossilised into a habit that marked an identity.

Another angle of same scenario could also be observed in the case of 'C' in this study, where the adaptation of language (accent and pronunciation) is influenced by the immersion into the surrounding environment and for 'survival'.

The Construction of Cultural Identity in TCKs

Most TCKs identify themselves as the 'cosmopolitan people' (Fail, Thompson, and Walker, 2004; Gunesch, 2004; Alyeksyeyeva, 2018); who consider themselves comfortable and able to adapt in any environment but has no specific environment that they define and relate to as their particular cultural identity. Grimshaw and Sears (2008), and Straffon (2003) stated that these students often feel that they are seen as outsiders to both parent's and host's cultures due to the inconsistencies of precepts in their upbringing histories. However, despite the discrepancies of cultural understandings, the core beliefs of the family's origin is usually deeply ingrained in the TCKs. The difference of manifestation is whether the individual decides to practice it or not.

According to Condon (1973) as cited by Lai and Kuo (2006), culture is defined as the way of life that dictates the attitude, beliefs, actions, and values that further formed the 'code' where one lives by. Culture has many facets and dimensions that cover all aspects of life. Hofstede did a wide research based on the findings from various countries to determine the predominant cultural dimensions in different geographical areas. The cultural dimensions as proposed by Hofstede in his cultural framework are the power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede,1986; Bauer et al., 2000; Marcus.2001; Nguyen et al.,2006; Joy and Kob, 2009). The theoretical framework is going to be used as a reference to explore the cultural identity construction by analysing a generalised example; Asian students.

Asian students are the classic presentations of cases that are often associated with the collectivist, high power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and a more masculine cultural dimensions. These dimensions' characteristics emphasize the importance of academic achievements, distinct gender roles, and respect towards the elderly and authoritative figures; just to list down a few common distinctive features from the mentioned dimension spectrums (Hofstede,1986; Bauer et al., 2000; Marcus.2001; Nguyen et al.,2006; Joy and Kob, 2009). It is not uncommon to notice that the TCKs from this cultural background usually still retain some of the characteristics from the aforementioned dimensions, despite being in countries practicing the values of the opposite cultural spectrum.

For example; it is not surprising to see a Malay TCK growing up in Australia, adopting English as his/her language identity and speaking like a native, being actively participative in the two-way interaction and class activities in a common Australian classroom setting (versus the more reserved nature of the Malay culture), but still practicing a higher level (more than what is defined as normal in Australian standard) of respect towards the elderly or authoritative figures compared to their local counterparts. Most Asians, despite being overseas also tend to avoid confrontation with authority, and more focussed in striving towards academic excellence.

Despite adopting English as the pseudo language identity, the cultural compass of most TCKs is not always pointing West, as per the common association with the language. These basic values, originating from the parental cultural background are significant in giving the fundamental framework of one's set of moral principles (Silva, 2021). It is notable to observe that despite the fact that a foreign host's environment is usually the dominant factor in

determining the TCK's language identity, it does not always applies to the formation of the basic foundation of cultural identity. The core and integral set of ideologies and beliefs of one's way of life are usually imprinted and cultivated by the upbringing, family values, and household influences on the formative years of the child growing up. The foundation somehow withstands the external pulls from the other environmental factors, even though that erosion, adaptation and assimilation with the host culture still occur to a certain extent.

The Cultural Mediator in The Classroom
Even though the majority of this paper discusses the issues in the context of the TCKs as students, it is important to note that most of the English teachers teaching in international schools are Third Culture individuals as well. This is due to the demand of these schools and the parents to have native speakers teaching the language. The attractions of better reward and job prospects are also some of the motivating factors that drive native-speaking teachers to meet the aforementioned demands. Hence, most of these teachers have been living abroad (in non-native English speaking countries); away from their home countries for a period of time, and has established their own personalised niche of culture as well.

The advantage is that these teachers can relate to the students in the sense of 'cosmopolitanism' and being 'global citizens'. They also possess a greater sense of cultural sensitivity compared to their colleagues that have no such exposure (Straffon, 2003).The drawback however is that both parties (of teacher and students) are in a limbo of cultural identity; that resulted from the 'rootlessness' and 'no sense of belonging' state, being caught in between cultures. The teaching and learning approach in the classroom can be a complex process because the general cultural rule of thumb is somehow bent due to the redefined cultural rules under the light of cosmopolitanism.

Halliday (1973) as cited by Lain and Kuo (2006) suggested that the language functions can be divided into seven parts; to be instrumental, regulatory, representational, interactive, personal, heuristic, and imaginative. A teacher has to be aware of these functions to further capture the essence of English as a language and an organic cultural extension to benefit the students in their learning. The awareness will not only broaden the TCK learners' knowledge and skills on the usage of the language in context, but also to enrich the learning experience in a more comprehensive approach where they can use the language to express their own personalised 'niche-culture'.

CONCLUSION
Gleason (1961) as cited by Lai and Kuo (2006) stated that language is not simply just an extension of culture, but it is the embodiment of the culture itself. The exploration on the topic has shown that the formation of language and cultural identity in TCKs are both affected directly and indirectly by the acquisition of English as the second/foreign language. A study by Dewaele et. al (2020) observed that having the background as polyglots and/or exposure to cultural diversity do have impact on one's identity.

Spencer (2022) noted that TCK learners would benefit greatly from fostering a more cohesive and collaborative community with respective parties working together. Stakeholders should be clear with a collective goal in instilling a conducive culture in the classroom for learning, but with the L1-identity and passport culture still be allowed to flourish at the same time.

According to Schmidt (2017), TCKs experience a cycle of language proficiency that diminishes and strengthens over time depending on the language dominance present in the

current environment. The fluidity of the identity formation is also supported by de Waal (2021), noting that TCKs constantly re-evaluate their cultural identity. The identity is constantly moulded and altered by the connections with their surrounding community.

The process is further catalysed and assisted by the environmental elements that influence the direction of the identity formation, either towards the original culture or away from it. Halls (1971) declared that culture is one's vital adjusting method in order to survive. Hence, despite the shift in cultural and dogma comprehension and redefinition in this particular group, it is actually a natural process of human evolution. The old adage of 'survival of the fittest' somehow applies towards the socio-cultural context as well. In order to survive changes, then modification and adaptation of existing system are needed. It is indeed a paradox as mentioned by Hall (1971), as a cultural adjustment is needed for survival, but at the same time it is also needed to be preserved to maintain an identity.

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