



**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON HOW MUSHROOMING GATED-COMMUNITIES
BUILD A NEW PODIUM OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SET-UP TO DEVELOP
SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AMONG CHILDREN**

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Abstract

Numerous Socio-cultural theories have traced the link between the inherent, underlying mechanisms of language acquisition and socio-cultural background in which human beings exist. This paper throws light on how a new, mushrooming socio-cultural background that is 'Gated community' triggers language learning process in general and English language acquisition in particular among children. Researches by behaviourist theorists Skinner and Ivan Pavlov state the underneath factors such as social settings, psychological factors and language learning system are interlinked. Structuralist linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin lee Whorf have done extensive researches on society, thought process and language. An ethnographic research includes a close observation, semi-structured interviews and a survey using questionnaire. A survey using questionnaire was carried out involving 25 children in a Gated community located in OMR, Chennai. The various aspects namely multiculturalism, multilingualism, amenities, interactions, conversations and celebrations are mapping areas in the second language acquisition process. The application of sociocultural language learning theories that developed half a century ago to a recently developed form of living namely Gated community is a novel approach and the literature review reveals that this as an under-researched area.

Key words: behaviour, culture, ethnography, gated-community, multi-culturalism, society, stimulus

Introduction

An Anecdote says, "Two young fish were at the mission of exploration in an Ocean. An old fish advised them not to go near the surface of water. They nodded and went away with a question to each other 'by any chance, do you know what water is?' "





This strikes an analogy “how a fish is related to water in the same way humans are related to a society”. Human beings exist in a society, intertwined with its culture, people and language without knowing how and what of it. To observe a language and learning process of a person one should analyse the socio cultural background of the person. Language and socio-cultural backgrounds are like two sides of a coin. Only the combination of the two will give value to the coin rather isolating them. Sociocultural background has strong influence on linguistic behaviour in humans. This study dominated the field of linguistics in the later part of the twentieth century whereas the modern age pays more emphasis on the technology oriented language studies and emerging trends in second language teaching and learning. This paper throws light on developing Gated communities and how it triggers second language acquisition in the speech communities as they are social as well as instrumental for learners to acquire a language. They serve as immediate speech community for the learners to participate in. Hudson (1980) says the top-down processes simultaneously involved in speech production require content knowledge about a topic, cultural knowledge that informs determination of properties and provides macro social context for expression, and knowledge of micro social context such as the significance of the immediate communicative activity, speaker role and relationship to addressee, and appropriateness of conditions (e.g. what must be said, what may be said, and what should be unsaid).

Migration of Communities from ancient river-bed civilizations to modern Gated communities around industries and IT parks

Ancient history says the origin of civilisation development happened in, around and alongside of rivers. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilisation bear testimony to this. People settled as communities around rivers, slopes of mountains. They contributed a lot to the development of civilization in such a way that a massive transformation happened in the names of industrialization and urbanization. When natural resources started depleting, industries and software companies gave a sort of virtual-natural sources and communities started settling around them. Since horizontal occupation is almost exploited, it is time to explore and exploit vertical space for building new houses so as to accommodate the exponentially growing and other migrating populations in urban. Uncultivated agricultural lands and dried riverbeds started losing its identity leaving not even an iota of trace of it in multi-storeyed sky scrapers. Sometimes parents simply name their children with the names of their grandparents and parents and fail miserably to inherit their ideologies. In the same way all gated communities in urban bear only the names of woods, hillsides, parks, rivers, and lakes in the absence of the real being of them. A gated community in urban stacks almost a small village vertically. If one is assigned with a task of arranging fifty match boxes one above another so as to replicate a multi-storied building, he





may fail drastically. But structural engineering has been contributing a lot in infrastructure developments and creating vertical marvels in building construction.

What is Ethnographic research?

Etymological meaning of Ethnography says, ethos means 'culture' graph is 'study'. The following definition of Dick Hobbs(2006) comprises the characteristic of ethnographic research.

A research method located in the practice of both sociologists and anthropologists, and which should be regarded as the product of a cocktail of methodologies that share the assumption that personal engagement with the subject is the key to understanding a particular culture or social setting. Participant observation is the most common component of this cocktail, but interviews, conversational and discourse analysis, documentary analysis, film and photography, life histories all have their place in the ethnographer's repertoire. Description resides at the core of ethnography, and however that description is constructed, it is the intense meaning of social life from the everyday perspective of groups' members that is sought.

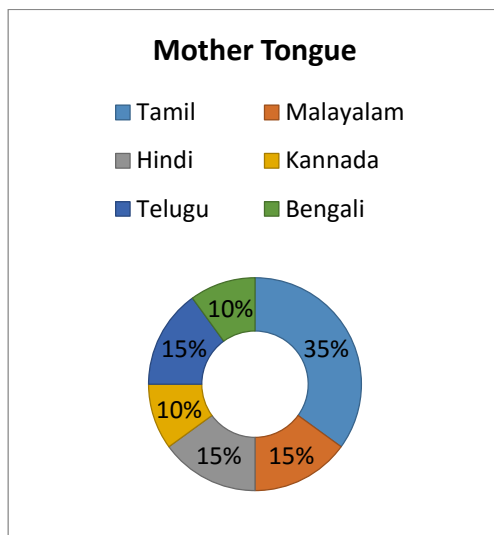
In the words of Nunan (1992) an ethnographic research is the study of the culture/characteristics of a group in real world rather than laboratory settings .This paper has identified Gated communities as a principle context of study at a micro level to study the L2 acquisition. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) have defined ethnography as, 'a branch of anthropology dealing with the scientific description of individual cultures'. This type of research is conducted by researchers who are in day-today, face-to-face contact with the people they are studying and who are thus both participants in and observers of the lives under study. Hence the writer of this paper resides in a Gated community and also a researcher in ELT, the participation of the researcher in community has prompted an ethnographic research. The social setting of this research is a hub of IT companies. Next to Bangalore, the electronic city, Chennai boasts with the maximum number of IT companies in India. Children are the subjects of this study as they are at their critical period for acquisition of language. Bialystok(1997) has opined , 'the advantage of young children with respect to acquisition of the second language should be ascribed to such factors as social, experiential or educational aspects of second language learning, all of which tend to favour young learners and make of childhood an optimal time in which to embark upon learning a second language'.





Merging of the shades of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and bilingualism in Gated communities

Culture can be defined as a kind of knowledge which we learn from other people, either by direct instruction or by watching their behaviour. As we learn our culture from those around us, we are assuming that we share it with them, so this kind of knowledge is likely to play a major role when we communicate with them, and in particular when we use language. Most of languages are cultural languages since they are learnt from others. Gated communities are a mosaic of people from divergent cultures and various languages. One can experience a sort of multiculturalism and multilingualism. These are the two hands that lifted and held English language aloft for the whole world. The same reason is applicable in Gated communities at micro level. Residents resort to English to get connected within their community and also to avoid hegemony of one over the other. The following picture of a research survey reveals the percentage of multilingualism in a gated community along the OMR, Chennai.



The following extract of Sapir and Whorf hypothesis cited by Hudson (1980), a landmark linguistic theory states the relationship among language, culture and thought.

..... the background linguistic systems in other words the grammar of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of this mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar and differs from slightly to





greatly between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare each observer in the face; on the contrary the world is presented in a Kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds....”(p.96)

A gated community brings in a pinch of globalisation, multiculturalism and multilingualism and leaves a sort of kaleidoscopic flux of impressions in the minds of children and provides impetus for second language acquisition.

Celebrations and festivals set stage for cultural exchanges

As gated community is a potpourri of various cultures, celebrations mean a sort of cultural exchange. This provides a platform not only for cultural exchange but also help the children shed fear and inhibition for acquiring language. A sense of proximity is established. All festivals like Christmas, Dassara, New Year, Deewali, Onam, Makara Sankaranthi and the days of national importance like Independence and Republic days are being celebrated in gated Communities.

The following excerpts of social interaction among the children before a festive occasion exemplify the above stated argument;

Renisha: We have Onam celebrations this week. Which event are you in?

Bindu: I'm in a skit that describes the story of The King Mahabali

Darius: Who is Mahabali?

Bindu: Onam is celebrated in a way to remember King Bali who was a generous, pious king and God wanted to test his generosity and came in the form of a dwarf man called Vamana. He pleaded the king for three feet of land. The king without recognising him as an incarnation of god readily agreed as it is meagre for him to grant. The vamana transformed into a giant man and measured the world and sky in two feet. When he finds no space for the third feet of land, the king Mahabali bowed, gave his own head for the Vamana to stamp on.

Renisha: Wow, What an interesting story you're going to enact.





Conversations And Social Interactions Develop Descriptive Skills

Constructionist theory says that it is through the child's experiences from the manipulating and changing world that the child acquires knowledge about relations within and between people and objects.

The following excerpts of a conversation between the two children who don't have a common mother tongue shows how one boy tries to describe a food item which is not existing in other's state.

Rohit: It is time; I am leaving to have my snack. Had yours ?

Pranav: I had paniyaram.

Rohit: What is Paa'niyaaram?

Pranav: It is a small , ball-like, spherical, soft, made out of rice flour and jaggery.

Rohit: Is it similar to vada?

Pranav: Yes, It comes in two tastes namely sweet paniyaram and kara paniyaram.

Rohit's curiosity to know about a new thing is revealed in his question. Pranav's answer exhibits his descriptonal skill which enables Rohit to perceive a new thing which he has not seen before.. As a result he is able to associate it with some other similar item which is known to him. This type of association of unknown objects from known objects has dominated the linguistic research for many centuries and has proved as an effective technique in language acquisition.

Amenities in gated communities help develop conceptualisation of objects among children

Gated communities bring all essential facilities, resources, conveniences, services related to education, health, life-style, entertainment, sports which everyman needs and utilises from his birth unto the end under a single umbrella. One can have a Mexican pizza served in an Italian dining table at his roof-top swimming pool after undergoing Thai massaging. Gated communities vie with each other to replenish the local projects with universal themes in a way to delight the customers. The residents get an insight into the cultures of different countries without even visiting them. The following extract shows how a child gets to know about a culturally alien thing and acquires new vocabularies.





A conversation between a child and his mother while walking past an amenity written 'Sauna and Jacuzzi':

Child: What is 'Sauna and Jacuzzi' ?

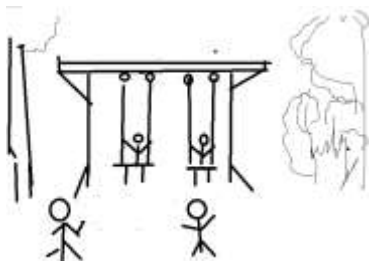
Mother: Sauna is a room where one can have hot steam and Jacuzzi is a water tub with body massaging systems.

Child: I thought they are names of some persons.

Mother: (laughs) oh, no.

The mother takes the child inside that room and explains how it works. The child is now getting acquainted with the things that are not present in their culture usually. The term Sauna has its origin in Finnish language. That is the reason the term doesn't sound like English to the child.

Indoor And Play Areas In Gated Communities Propel Motivation For Language Acquisition



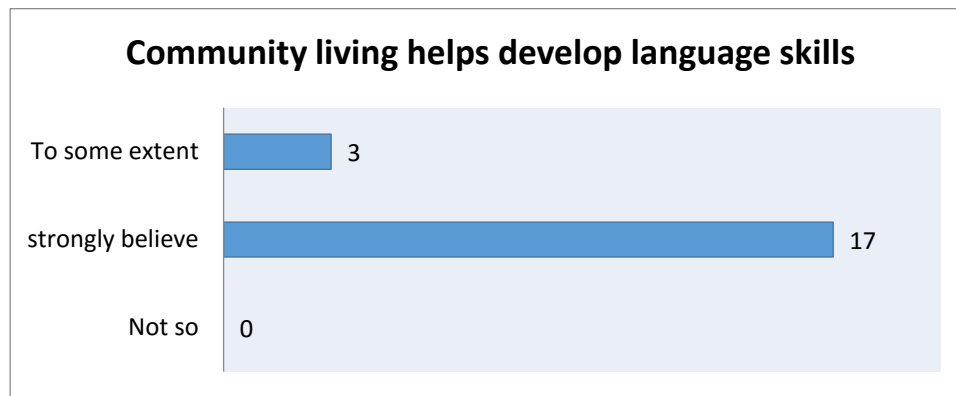
This picture shows that a child pointing to a swing in the play area is stimulated to speak and doesn't know the linguistic label of the word and makes a meaningless utterance like 'boo boo' or something as it does with any other objects. Another child standing nearby helps out by saying 'swing'. The child observes the utterance made by the peer and imitates the sound subsequently leading to internalizing the term. Since the child visits the same place on daily-basis, it reinforces the term and the term becomes an active vocabulary. This situation traces back to a behaviourist psychological language learning theory cited in 'second language acquisition' by Muriel Saviile-Troike (2006). "Early proponents of CA (contrastive Analysis) assumed that language acquisition essentially involves habit formation in a process of Stimulus-Response-Reinforcement(S-R-R). Learners respond to the stimulus (linguistic input), and reinforcement strengthens (i.e. habituates) the response; they imitate and repeat the language that they hear, and when they are reinforced for that response, learning occurs. The implication is that, 'practice makes perfect.' " (p.35)





Result of a survey on the role of Gated community in language development of children

Apart from interviewing, participating and observation, a survey research was conducted among 25 children residing in a gated community in order to measure their second language acquisition skills. Various parameters such as the children’s mother tongue, language of their interaction in group and neighbours within the gated community, role of community living in language skills development were taken into account. To a question on how community living helps develop second language acquisition, 85 percentage has been recorded a positive reply.



Conclusion

Hence an ethnographic research is not limited to testing of hypothesis but of a discovery-based and inductive one, the extracts of interaction among children and the narration of the observation of the researcher serve the purpose of this study. Even the analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings and function of human actions. It mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations within quantifications and statistical analysis plays a subordinate role at most .The longitudinal nature and volume of the ethnographic research serve as the limitation of this study. Because gated communities are recently developed one and still one has to wait for much a time to measure its growth and developments. This is a micro-level study on such newly emerging social set-up providing scope for more future researches.

Appendix1

A survey on second language acquisition of children living in a Gated Community

1. Name of the child -
2. Sex - Male / Female
3. Age -





4. Grade -
5. Board of study - State Board / Matriculation / CBSE / IGCSE / ICSE
6. What is your mother tongue?
7. Which language do you choose while communicating with your friends who don't know your mother tongue?
 - a. English b. Tamil c. Any other languages
8. Do you participate in the festivals organised in your Gated Community?
Yes/no
9. Do you play with your friends in the indoor and outdoor games of this Gated Community ?
Yes/no
10. What is your favourite pastime?
 - a. Watching TV b. playing indoor games c. Playing outdoor games
 - d. playing video games e. Reading books f. Drawing and colouring g. Others
11. Do you try to read from hoardings, notices, pamphlets of which you come across?
12. Of all the following four skill sets of English language, which skill do you think develops while living in this gated community ? comfortable with?
 - a. Speaking b. Listening c. Reading d. Writing

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