



## Discursive Psychology in Language Education: Cases of Home Culture Attachment and World Englishes

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**Abstract.** The present study aimed at investigating the underlying relationship between language and thought through the detailed qualitative analysis of interviews with 10 language teachers on issues pertaining to home culture attachment and world Englishes. As a result, being seriously challenged by the interviewer, significant alterations were noticed in the individual's thoughts even to the point of producing contradictory ideas which highlighted the fact that language is more likely to shape thoughts in constructing reality. Conducting in-depth interviews, the very participants who had believed to be culturally attached to their home culture proved not only to be detached but also to assume a negative attitude about the application of their culture and the principles of world Englishes in their teaching methodology. Thus, the findings of the study seem to have further major implications for researchers to make rigorous empirical analysis of the record of natural interactions in place of the widespread use of interviews and surveys due to the tentative and inconsistent results they might produce.

*Keywords:* language, thought, home culture attachment, world Englishes, empirical analysis

### 1. Introduction

The relationship between language and cognition has long been one of the most controversial debates in the fields of linguistics and psychology. The question whether language shapes or is shaped by cognitive categories has been addressed differently by the test of time in the long run. In actual fact, in the 1970s, social psychologists (e.g., Gergen, 1973, 1989) criticized the very tenets of cognitive psychology by highlighting

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the role of language with the introduction of discursive psychology as a viable alternative to cognitive psychology.

Discursive psychology was not only a *turn to language* in social sciences but also a *discursive turn* in social psychology which gave a fresh start to the study of the relation between language and cognition by emphasizing the leading role of language in the construction of social reality and subjectivity through the meticulous analysis of naturalistic material, everyday conversations, political interviews, and newspaper reports (Hollway, 1989). Indeed, all the acquired languages would have a great impact on our ways of thinking and using them (Llurda, 2004), and English language is of no exception as learning English may lead to crossing the boundaries of one's home culture into a foreign culture and affecting one's extent of cultural attachment (Pishghadam & Sadeghi, 2011a). To put it in simple terms, language teaching is culture teaching through which ideologies can be exchanged (Lessard-Clauston, 1997 as cited in Pishghadam & Sadeghi, 2011a); however, these exchanges are not necessarily promising since there is no guarantee that the two cultures would be automatically enriched (Pishghadam & Navari, 2010).

Henceforth, language teaching is deemed to be an intellectual game (Pishghadam & Shirmohammadi, 2012) which plays a critical role in shaping the learners' identities (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012); therefore, language teachers as the medium of instruction should be well trained to cope with cultural issues and cultural derichment.

Within the realm of language teaching, studies have been focused on the role of home culture attachment. Pishghadam, Hashemi, and Bazri (2013) have detected the underlying constructs of home culture attachment from the learners' perspective. Other studies have been concentrated on finding the relationship between teachers' access to social and cultural capital and home culture attachment (Pishghadam & Sadeghi, 2011a), implementing local culture and world Englishes principles within the framework of language teaching (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2012; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011), and investigating the relationship between learners' cultural intelligence and home culture attachment (Azizi, Hosseini Fatemi, Pishghadam, & Ghapanchi, 2015); however, a need exists for sharper focus on the exclusive role of teachers' perception of maintaining local culture in their classes. Thus, the study is noteworthy on the grounds that it attempts at gaining twofold objectives by delving into, exclusively, teachers' conception of putting home culture and world Englishes tenets into practice in the light of the detailed examination of language and thought relationship.



## 2. Background

### 2.1 Contemporary Language and Thought Theories

Are words and sentences merely means of communication or they are a part of the process of thinking themselves? Chomsky (1965) undermined the role of the surrounding environment at the expense of the inborn language mechanism existence emphasizing the significance of the syntax and that language learning is independent of cognition.

Indeed, the separation of language and mind was rejected by many linguists and resulted in the emergence of cognitive linguistics in 1970 (Perlovsky, 2006). Cognitive linguists believed that formal structures of language are viewed as reflections of general conceptual organization, categorization principles, and processing mechanisms (Lakoff, 1990). Essentially, Piaget (1926) portrays cognitive structure and language learning in the light of stages of language development. He maintains that in the first sensorimotor stage, the child is able to develop mental representation that is holding images in mind which precedes symbolic representation emerging afterwards.

Unlike Piagetian paradigm, in Vygotskyian paradigm, language plays a prominent role as it is a linkage between the intellectual and social life. Taking this line, language is the force that drives cognitive development as it mediates the child's involvement with the intellectual and social environment (Vygotsky, 1986). Another view of language and thought relationship is known as linguistic relativity being proposed by Whorf (1956) which assumes that language differences reflect differences in culture and conceptual structure. In other words, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis asserts that one's understanding of the world is to a large extent shaped by his native language; thus, two people of totally different native languages in structure would frame various perceptual model of the world (Schwarcz, 1966).

Ultimately, with the introduction of discursive psychology in the 1970s, emphasis was placed on the leading role of language in construction of subjectivity and social reality (Willig, 2013). Essentially, it is concerned with the naturally occurring interactional discourse through which people achieve their interpersonal goals (Potter, 1997). More specifically, Edwards (1997) underlines three major elements of discursive psychology comprising respecification of psychological topics and explanations, investigations of how everyday psychological categories are used in discourse, and studies of how motives, intentions, prejudices, memory, etc. are handled and managed implicitly with the use of discursive devices. In sum, a brief outline of various languages and thought theories is as follows:



**Table 1.** Language and Thought Theories

Chomsky: Language is independent of cognition
Piaget: Mental representation precedes symbolic representation
Vygotsky: Language is the force that drives cognitive development
Sapir- Whorf: Understanding of the world is to a large extent shaped by his native language
Cognitive linguistics: language is a reflections of thought
Discursive Psychology: Language can construct social reality. It constitutes and is constituted by thought

## 2.2 The Significance of Home Culture Attachment and World Englishes

Learning a foreign language may result in recreating learners' cultural identity and home culture detachment (Pishghadam et al., 2013); therefore, beware of the consequences of adhering to linguistic imperialism is of pivotal importance. To achieve this end, testifying teachers' perception of world Englishes, as a practical tool to be applied to challenge the standard language ideology and replace it by the liberation linguistics ideology (Bolton, 2004 as cited in Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011), should gain special attention. More importantly world Englishes discourse, as the outcome of postmodernism, emphasizes the interdependence between appropriateness and sociocultural context (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011); thus, in as much as it calls for a method that takes the role of context and appropriateness into account accordingly, discursive psychology as the post modernist method seems to be better corresponding to its elements.

## 2.3 Empirical Framework

Within the realm of recent achievements of language and thought relationship, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and discursive psychology have gained prime significance. Whorf's (1956) investigation of Hopi language revealed that grammar of Hopi bore a relation to Hopi culture in terms of time, space, substance, and matter. In Hopi language, verbs have no tenses like the three tense system of past, present, and future as they believe in the cyclic system of time and its complex unity; henceforth, a system of two, an earlier and later, harmonizes with their thought rather than objectifying time units horizontally. However, the absence of tense in Hopi language might be compensated with the presence of aspect in verb which denotes different degrees of duration as well as different kinds of tendency (Whorf, 1956). Besides, Hopi does have ways of showing simultaneity and anteriority via subordinate clauses. In the same vein, Whorf (1956) identified the absence of pluralization, quantification, and time expression in Hopi



language due to their disinclination of objectifying imaginary entities in the same way as concrete objects.

With regard to discursive psychology, traditional topics such as causal attribution (Edwards & Potter, 1992), prejudice (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), identity (Edwards, 1997), script theory (Edwards, 1997), construction of factual accounts (Potter, 1996), and Racism (Willig, 2013) have been reexamined; however, to the researchers' best knowledge, in the realm of language teaching, no study has exclusively approached challenging teachers' mindset of world Englishes in the light of discursive psychologists' perspective. Thus, the present study attempts at testifying the legitimacy of language and thought relationship considering the basic tenets of discursive psychology by conducting semi-structured interviews with English language teachers on their view of home culture attachment and world Englishes.

### 3. Method

A community sample of 10 Iranian language teachers comprising six females and four males, who were teaching at a private language institute in Mashhad and believed in the greatness of their culture, participated in this study. The participants all held B.A. in English language and literature, English language teaching, and English language translation. Their overall mean age was 30.62 ranging from 20 to 34 years. In fact, purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure that the interviewees had sufficient familiarity with the target language textbooks and the teaching context. Their teaching experience ranged from three to eight years. Given that the aim of the study was to examine the impact of language on shaping cognition, a qualitative research method of semi-structured interviewing was opted for as it yielded rich and complex data for the data analysis which was expected and desirable in revealing the processes of complex realities construction (Dornyei, 2007). The interview questions were pre-prepared based on Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012), Pishghadam et al. (2013), Pishghadam and Shirmohammadi (2012), Azizi et al. (2015), and Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011a, 2011b) findings on home culture attachment as the interview guide to reinforce the flexibility and the systematization of the study (Dornyei, 2007).

The interviews were conducted between April and May 2015 at the teachers working place to promote the familiar setting for obtaining naturally occurring data. For the ease of analysis, they were allowed to share their ideas in whichever language they preferred (English or Persian). They were ensured about the confidential nature of this study and were told that with their consent, their voices would be fully recorded for later transcription and analysis. In all, the recorded interviews (154 minutes/ 2 hours and 34



minutes) were transcribed by the researchers and analyzed meticulously to extract the common themes. Indeed, saturation point was gained by ten participants. To gain the research objective, contrary to the traditional view of minimizing the interviewer's role during interviews, the researchers not only did not take a neutral stance but also adopted a more argumentative as well as facilitative role to explore the consequence of their intervention on the participants' shifting of attitudes towards home culture attachment and world Englishes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In order to illustrate how language can influence one's thoughts, the main emerging themes of the extracts are detected and presented based on Willig's (2013) guidelines who identified disclaiming, extreme case formulating, variability, contradiction, and reality construction as the dominant language devices to shape one's thoughts. All extracts are concerned with the participants' view of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and home culture attachment.

##### Extract 1

I- *So you declare that you won't teach local textbooks at all, but...international textbooks can result in English linguistic imperialism, can't they?*

R- *I am not against teaching locally designed textbooks, you see, uh... if they represent the true target language culture, but if they are merely published to reflect merely our own culture, then what's the use of them?*

This extract opens with a disclaimer (Hewitsand & Stokes, 1975 as cited in Willig, 2013) which is a verbal device that anticipates and rejects potentially negative attributions. In this case, *I am not against teaching locally designed textbooks, you see*, disclaims possible attributions of home cultural detachment with regard to the forthcoming comment *then what's the use of them?* To justify the criticism, the respondent employs an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986 as cited in Willig, 2013), where claims are taken to their extremes to achieve the highest extent of warrant with the repeated use of the word *merely*. The simultaneous application of a disclaimer as well as an extreme case formulation paves the way for undermining the role of local textbook along with disclaiming any negative attributions of cultural detachment which indicates that discourse has an action orientation as hereby it has achieved the disclaiming and blaming effect discursively. Besides, the interviewer resorts to an interrogative (Tag question) (Hepburn & Potter, 2010) to gain the expected and preferred response while affecting the respondent's mindset.



Extract 2

R- *What I really think is recruiting non-native teachers whose field of study is English....at least they have the required knowledge of teaching.*

Extract 3

R- *Why shall we recruit non-native teachers when the poor students find the non-native accent less intelligible?*

Surprisingly, the two conflicting comments are taken from the same extract which would make it difficult to establish a clear attitude towards the informant's stance unless the surrounding text is taken into account. In fact, analyzing the accompanying texts revealed that the respondent was in favor of non-native teachers for the position of teaching training courses for the pre service teachers as they majored specifically in English language teaching, whereas he favored native teachers for instructing at the accent classes. As a result, it becomes evident that, discourse is organized to accomplish social function (Willig, 2013).

Extract 4

*Yes, here comes the problem of EFL or ELF. Surely I opt for EFL ... You know, ELF is just an amalgamation of different accents, cultures, norms, and identities. Uh...it brings no more than confusion. I, as an observer, find ELF completely groundless.... It goes nowhere than distorting people's thought about language learning objectives.*

This extract betrays how discourse constructs the object of which it speaks. The speaker's version of ELF does not solely provide a negative description of a commonly accepted object of thought, instead, the object itself is constructed in a way that commands a negative evaluation.

Therefore, as Campbell (1986) expresses, examining the relationship between language and cognitive development is analogous to getting into the dark forest and the researcher should merely be aware of keeping off the danger. In so doing, applying discursive psychology might be constructive as it is not merely a methodology but a theoretical way of perceiving the nature of discourse and psychological phenomena (Billig, 1997 as cited in Willig, 2013).

In particular, with the aid of discursive psychological approach, the study has offered novel insights and deeper understanding of the inextricable relationship of language and thought. Indeed, meticulous analysis of the first extract demonstrates that the findings of the study are in line with Edwards (2005), who pinpointed how specific



words, descriptions, and accounts are employed to gain the expected interpersonal goal. It substantiates Potter and Edwards's (2001) assertion of the significant role of world descriptions and psychological states in action formation and the management of accountability. Besides, it corroborates Edwards (1997) and Potter (1996) who claimed that, causality and accountability are often managed indirectly and covertly through the building of factual description.

Discourse variability and contradictory characterization in the case of native or non-native teacher recruitment gives credence to Edwards and Potter's (1992), Potter and Wetherell's (1987), Wetherell and Potter's (1992), and Willig's (2013) insistence on the pre-eminent role of context within which social functions are organized to be accomplished. As a result, people's expressed thoughts are not necessarily consistent across social contexts and that discourse should be prioritized as it is where meanings are created and negotiated. Besides, the case of ELF description reinforces Edwards's (1995) declaration of the constructive role of discourse as it can create a particular version of things in presence of other available versions. In other words, it bears witness to Edwards and Potter (1992) who believed that, language constructs rather than represents social reality; thus, how social categories are constructed and with what consequences they are employed in conversations is of great importance.

Finally, the findings of study corroborate Pishghadam and Saboori (2011), as well as Pishghadam and Kamyabi (2008) who found English teachers more appreciative of standard English and considered new Englishes as illegitimate varieties of English.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper the thought and language relationship has been examined in the light of discursive psychology as a relatively new perspective in the area of language and social psychology. In so doing, it takes a high approach to the action orientation of talk by considering subtle account of conversational features and focusing on the ways the object of psychology is practical, accountable, situated, displayed, and embodied.

It is worth noting that the findings revealed that, language is highly constructive rather than merely reflective of social reality and that discourse is a matter of language in use and a form of social action. Empirical studies were highly indicative of positioning as an indispensable element of discourse which is conducive to the possibility of multiple, fluid, and shifting subjectivity.

Thereby, the study is noteworthy on the grounds that it promotes awareness of the ways in which perceptions of community, communication, and any phenomenon are



being constantly constructed in and through discourse. More importantly, it has major implications for researchers to reexamine traditional science education topics more analytically in view of discursive psychology. Besides, contrary to the traditional view of assigning a neutral role to the interviewer, it gives a new breath to the outstanding role of interviewer who should take rather an active role in challenging the very basis of the respondents' thoughts to obtain more valid and naturalistic data. Finally, it gives rise to the prominence of more meticulous empirical analysis of the naturally occurring conversations rather than the widespread application of structured interviews and surveys due to the potential variable results they might produce.

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