

THE GRAMMAR OF SELF IN SECOND AND OTHER LANGUAGE LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

As societies in many parts of this planet become more intricately linked, individuals who engage in communicative interactions between these societies may become more aware of their process of human development, particularly the development of an intercultural “self”. This intercultural self may be seen as an unfolding individual or an intercultural “personhood”. This basically describes a person who seeks to bridge the gaps between cultures, and whose “cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics are not limited, but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of his or her own culture” (Kim, 1994, p. 415). This intercultural self, or intercultural “personhood” may be subjected to an accelerated process of development through involvement in second language, or other language learning. Intercultural rules concerning what is preferred and what is to be avoided in a new language and in a new cultural context, create novel and challenging patterns of linguistic and social rules for the engaged, intercultural, communicative “self”. Through “grammars” or “rules”, we as unique individuals evaluate the situation and our self, according to demand, need for conformity, and principles of certain contexts. Therefore, as we develop new perceptions of ourselves in intercultural contexts, we each develop new rules or a new “grammar of self”, which may assist us in adapting to the principles at hand, in order that we may feel included and appropriate in each current context.

A second language learner, while working between the first and second languages, along with first and second cultures, may work within an “interlanguage” system (Brown, 1994). This refers to a separateness of a second language learner’s system which has an intermediate status that functions between the native and target languages. In this place,

the learners form their own unique linguistic systems that assist with providing order and structure to what is occurring in the present context. The grammar of self, or the rules for the social and linguistic self, are therefore transforming as this interlanguage system develops. This may be seen as an “inter-grammar of self” which strives to maintain a balance between the grammar of self of the native language and culture, and the grammar of self of the target language and culture. Various levels and stages of development may transpire within this dynamic of the unfolding interlanguage or inter-grammar of self. These stages may involve the making of linguistic and social choices, which may evolve from large amounts of mistakes or errors and small amounts of communicative successes, to large amounts of successes and social and linguistic competencies, with small amounts of mistakes and errors.

LANGUAGE SHOCK AND CULTURE SHOCK

Within the dynamics and contexts of second language learning, the identity or perception of one’s “self” may be shaken at its very foundations. Ellis (1986) called this “language shock”, where the learner experiences doubt and confusion when using the second language (p. 252). We may also consider a “grammar of self shock”, where a person experiences confusion and doubt concerning their choices of language in the new context. This disquieting occurrence is often exacerbated when a person moves to another culture and is attempting to learn a second language, while being away from his or her home environments. However, this disquieting effect may also occur when students are deeply engaged in classroom second language learning within their own home cultures. This phenomenon may occur due to the sudden lack of confidence that persons feel when they can no longer understand, nor express themselves well with a new language.

This disquieting effect also occurs because languages are not just tools, but rather they are a “whole repository of thought and feeling” (Lim, 1991, p. 58). Under certain circumstances the language may actually re-shape the thinking and feeling of the language learner. That is to say that while a person is engaging in the learning of linguistic grammar, which may include levels of analysis and engagement with rules of

vocabulary, phonology and syntax, he or she may also be engaging in the socializing “grammar of the self”, whereby rules and knowledge of situations and relationships, along with appropriate social activity, are being learned, implicitly or explicitly. The implicit learning involves rules or knowledge which are not directly stated or expressed, and the explicit learning involves clearly expressed rules or knowledge. Through a variety of cues from others within a particular context, language learners begin to consciously or unconsciously follow interactional rules, because, as Taylor and Cameron (1987) explained, they become aware of the interactional consequences of not doing so. Lim (1991) provided an example of implicit learning which may occur unconsciously. She noted that there is a problem with English being the undisputed vehicle of international communication. She found that the problem involved the influences of American capitalism, along with social, moral and cultural values, which often accompanied the language, and which were sometimes unsettling for individuals involved.

As students are introduced to new values and rules of a culture within social or linguistic contexts, there is often an implicit training of these members of the group, towards a type of social character or towards certain patterns of a culture which dominate the group (Freebody, 1990). There may be periods of confusion and disorientation for some individuals in these new cultural settings. This disorientation is often considered “culture shock” (Lifley, 1989; and Hall & Hall, 1990). Culture shock may occur when a person is unfamiliar with the social conventions of a new culture. It may also occur when a person is familiar with social conventions but is not willing to perform according to these rules (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). We can see, then, that as a student encounters these linguistic, social and cultural challenges and influences, a new identity and perception of the self and a new grammar of self may be developing, consciously and unconsciously.

Language teaching involves the introduction of a new language into a language ecology which already exists for a person. A language “ecology”, from the Greek word *oikos*, house or home, (Woolf, 1974), may be seen as the home language, or the comfortable native language through which a person engages in communicative interactions. The self

then, in second language or second culture learning, is immersed into a new ecology or new home-language communicative approach which is suddenly unfamiliar. This also may lead to the disquieting effects of the new language learning.

Muhlhausler (1994) suggested that linguistic imperialism may occur through the promotion of one-way language learning, whereby there is a major emphasis on the flow of information from the more powerful to the more powerless in the linguistic context. In the face of these implicit and explicit forces in our classrooms, Muhlhausler noted that it is important that we give sensitive consideration to how the introduction of the new language affects the other languages, the speakers of the other languages, and the well-being of those individual selves who are engaged in the learning of the new language. Therefore, through second and other language learning, along with second culture and other culture exposure, we may begin to view some of the complexities which are involved with the developing of the new “grammar of self” for each of the students involved in social and linguistic contexts.

PERSONALITY, LANGUAGE AND THE GRAMMAR OF SELF

As second and other language learners, we arrive in a classroom with certain personality traits. Based on what is usually normal for our personality characteristics, that is, our “enduring traits of sensibilities” (Kim, 1994, p. 399), we choose to communicate with specific words or signals, but we adapt to our shifting perceptions of those with whom we are interacting. Schram (1994) referred to two major aspects of the self. These included the “enduring self” that has a deep-seated sense of continuity and self-history, and the “situated self” that has adaptive capabilities that deal with context-specific aspects of our personhood and environments. While engaged in adaptations to our shifting perceptions of ourselves in each context, Edwards and Westgate (1987) suggested that we are in a process whereby we “locate ourselves” socially. Often what is involved in our word and signal communication is the expression of how we perceive others and how we perceive ourselves, while making decisions about how to use specific aspects of the second language. It is as though we build ourselves a communicative map (Edwards and

Westgate, 1987), which includes signposts and rules for communicating and for coping with a great diversity of encounters in linguistics and in social life. We are, therefore, building a grammar of self through the development of thoughts about self and through the development of communication with others. Phe (1991) explained this as “natural language” which exists in two basic forms: language as an instrument of thought, which exists in the form of internal language used in monologues; and language as an instrument of communication which provides a system of phonic or graphic signs used for dialogues or discussions. Both of these forms of language, along with personality, contribute to the developing grammar of self.

Upon selection of linguistic and social choices, based on our personality, learning, experience, and the specific contextual situations, we then often observe or scan the conversation and the context for relevant evidence to test our judgments on our communicative choices. This scanning may include asking questions and clarifying our judgments and assumptions. Through this process of attempts at communicative competence, new perceptions of self and new grammars of self are evolving. That is, new rules about the self and new personal feed-back to the self about the self are being generated, as personalities, perceptions and contexts interact through second language communicative engagements.

COMMUNICATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

Shearer (1994) described three basic patterns of communicative engagements. Each of these patterns may elicit different linguistic approaches and different perceptions of the grammar of self. These three patterns include: “intracultural communication”; “cross-cultural communication”; and “intercultural communication”.

“Intra-cultural communication” is a communicative process whereby culture is implicit within the meaning systems of the individuals engaging in the communicative act, and outcomes are oriented towards the enhancement of these people’s own, or original, cultural and meaning systems. In this communicative engagement pattern, the grammar

of self, as relates to language and culture, may not be shaken dramatically. However, it may be challenged to some extent. Berg (1977) provided an example of a man who wanted to improve his reading and writing skills in his first language. This man was accustomed to using the word ‘cuddle’, but the reading text used the word ‘hug’. Since ‘cuddle’ was the word that carried the most expression for him, he felt that part of his ‘self’ was lost as he conformed to the use of the word ‘hug’ in the reading and communicating process.

The second pattern of communicative engagement is “cross-cultural communication”, whereby two distinct cultures and two differing meaning systems are involved with the two individuals engaging in the communicative process. In this situation, the outcomes of the communicative act anticipate the movement of one individual from his or her own or native culture into the meaning system of the other. In this context, the grammar of self of the individual who is moving into the new meaning or new language system, may be highly challenged and perhaps dis-eased or dis-quieted. New rules of linguistic and social choices are suddenly present, and the moving or changing individual encounters the “tyranny of choice”. Within this tyranny of choice is a cognitive and affective struggle that involves the giving up of old and trusted rules and patterns, while choosing new, and untested social and linguistic rules and patterns. It is possible that the native linguistic and social self could require a bit of grieving time over the discarding (even if a temporary discarding) of standard, tried-and-true social or linguistic grammars or rules. It is, in a way, the discarding of the previously acceptable grammar of self.

The third pattern of communicative engagement is “intercultural communication”, whereby people of two different cultures communicate and whereby both meaning systems and cultures are acknowledged and preserved as much as possible through mutual understanding and appreciation, and through negotiated choices of linguistic and social rules. Both individuals will experience some change and some challenge to their meaning systems. Both will respect the other. Each will determine the extent to which new information or perspectives will change their individual stance or location in relation

to the world, in relation to others, and in relation to their past and presently evolving grammar of self.

Within the communicative engagements of the second and third patterns, there lies the opportunity for us to become more acutely aware of our own particular patterns of social and linguistic rules and our personal grammar of self. This is due to the presence of a differing social and linguistic grammar of the other person with whom we are engaging. The differences themselves open new channels or spaces whereby we more clearly see our present grammar of self. We are then more capable of imagining possibilities of new and creative methods of communicative engagement, and of developing an innovative, unique, and acceptable personhood or grammar of self.

ACCULTURATION AND THE GRAMMAR OF SELF

Language is often a very effective tool for the maintenance of and expression of culture. As the grammar of self develops, and as language choices are made within linguistic and social contexts, the grammar of self and the native culture are both challenged. “Acculturation” transpires within these learning and changing processes. Ellis (1986) wrote that acculturation involves the process of becoming more adapted to a new culture. It also involves a reorientation of thinking, of feeling, and of communicating (Brown, 1994). A person’s world view, systems of thinking, ways of acting, and choices of communicating may be shifted and disrupted by changes in language and culture. This shifting then influences the unfolding, and simultaneous shifting of the grammar of self, as new personal rules are formed concerning social and linguistic choices.

Acculturation may be seen as an adaptation or competency which result when an individual who has a different cultural or language background, comes into contact with another culture and begins to change cultural patterns (Berry, 1980). Language and communication are the main vehicles through which this acculturation process often transpires. This process of acculturation is often based on a more inclusive and integrative view of individual persons and of various patterns of language and culture.

Taylor (1994) noted that there is a perspective transformation involved in this process, and that a “third culture” perspective develops. This consists of the ability to empathize with those of another culture and to be less judgmental and more accepting of differences and similarities. Cates (1990) suggested that a stronger sense of “global awareness” transpires as students become more deeply involved in new language and new cultural learning.

The learning process for the grammar of self, then, within the acculturation process, may involve the need to balance a cultural disequilibrium. Within the balancing act of cultural or language disequilibrium, we may choose behaviors which are grouped into three broad categories (Taylor, 1994). The first is ‘observer’ behavior, where we do a lot of watching, listening, and reading. The second is ‘participant’ behavior, where we actively participate in the host culture by working, socializing, shopping, and generally getting more communicatively involved with people. The third is ‘friendship’ behavior where we develop longer-termed, more committed or meaningful relationships with persons from another culture or language system. This involves the sharing of more meaningful choices of language and communication.

The expanding grammar of self allows a person to becomes more competent in intercultural communication through a capacity to suspend or hold back some old cultural and language ways, and to learn to accommodate new ways of others and new choices for self. There is an opening to and incorporating of new and different language and cultural patterns. A story of a rabbit portrays the direct opposite of the acculturation process. Kosinski (1983) told the story of a rabbit which escaped from his cage when the cage door was left opened. He came back to his cage, even though he had tasted freedom for a short time, because he now “carried the cage within himself; it bound his brain and heart (p. 228). Each of us has the potential of carrying these cultural and language cages within us, and each of us has the potential of transforming those cages into sustaining yet evolving communicative frameworks which enhance higher levels of acculturation through the acquisition of new language and cultural skills. An expanding and more inclusive grammar of self is vital in this process.

Even though there are many benefits to this acculturation process, there are also some negative perspectives. Scollon and Scollon (1995) argued that when one language group is more powerful than another, it produces a strong and enforcing influence on the less powerful group, to put aside its own culture and to adopt the ways of the more powerful group. This is then a process of cultural loss, which has a negative influence on some individuals.

Encountering a person from another culture or language system may provide us with novel language and social possibilities from which we may choose. Some possibilities will be seen as positive and some as negative, for the evolving grammar of self. Confucius was reported by Cranmer-Byng and Kapadia (1912) as having spoken about the learning from differences of people with whom he was relating. “If I am walking with two other men, each of them will serve as my teacher. I will pick out the good points of the one and imitate them, and the bad points of the other and correct them in myself” (p. 86). The grammar of self evolves in this way, with choices of good points to imitate, and bad points to correct in ourselves.

Through intercultural and interlanguage learning, there also lie the possibilities of discovering “how different peoples might understand each other better, how one culture is viewed by another, and new ways of observing our basic human commonalities, similarities, and uniquenesses” (Sandburg & Sue, 1989, p. 361). In these ways, then, we can see that each person may be a teacher for us as we continually develop our grammar of self through intercultural communicative engagements and through the learning of a second language.

INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY AND ASPECTS OF SELF CONCEPT

This grammar of self, as it evolves within contexts of second language learning and communicating across cultures, may incorporate a more expanded intercultural identity. Shearer (1994) noted 5 qualities of intercultural identity: 1) acceptance of original and

new cultural elements; 2) increased scope, depth and perspective in perception; 3) increased self-knowledge, self-trust, and self-directedness; 4) increased inner resilience that facilitates further development; 5) and increased creative resourcefulness to deal with new challenges.

Embodied within the grammar of self and intercultural identity is the perception of self or ‘self-concept’. Self-concept is described by Hansford (1988) as the immense diversity of perceptions regarding our physical, mental and social existence. He suggested that there are three major views of self: 1) the perceived self, which includes images of self in age, sex, socioeconomic status, occupation, career, organizations (including classrooms in schools), clubs, and material possessions; 2) the desired self, which may involve ideal images including endeavors and morals; 3) and the presenting self, which involves how a person behaves and presents his or her self to others in varying circumstances and contexts. Each of these aspects of self informs the grammar of self as to what choices are to be made in linguistic and social situations.

Hansford also described several dimensions of self which included: home self; social self; physical self; emotional self; and academic self. These aspects or dimensions also inform the grammar of self concerning appropriate choices to be made in communication and in second language learning.

The grammar of self is also affected by culture. Javidi and Javidi (1994) reported that Americans tend to emphasize self concept in terms of self-awareness, self-image, self-esteem, self-determination, self-reliance, self-actualization, and self-expression. Therefore, Americans tend to be influenced by language uses that are designed to relate to the self. In contrast, in most Eastern cultures, the self is more preoccupied with the maintaining of groups, such as immediate and extended family. Yum (1994) noted a major difference between East Asian and North American perspectives on communication. She noted the East Asian emphasis on social relationships as opposed to the North American emphasis on individualism. This difference alone leads to different orientations towards linguistic and social choices in communication, along with the

development of the grammar of self. With emphasis on an individualized grammar of self, priority is given to private interests and independence. With emphasis on social relationships or collectivity, as with the East Asians (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; and Brown, 1994), values and interests of the group are involved more in the formation of the grammar of self and in communicative choices.

Hansford (1983) reported on research concerning descriptions of the ‘inner self’ which consist of: the open self, with attitudes, beliefs and behaviors known to ourselves and others; the blind section of self, which includes those things that others know about us but which we do not, or choose not to know about ourselves; the hidden inner self which involves those inner ‘skeletons’ known to us but which we do not reveal to others; and the unknown self, which includes parts of the inner self that individuals and others do not know or do not understand. These are all aspects of the self which influence the grammar of self, and consequently the linguistic and social choices that an individual makes in second language learning.

SELF CONCEPT AND SELF-DISCLOSURE

When the self feels comfortable enough in a given context, a person may move from phatic communication to more self-disclosure. Phatic communion was described by Malinowski (1923) as small talk which occurs as an individual strives to define the self in a given context and attempts to find acceptance in expressing the self in relation to valued others in the context. In self-disclosure, a decision is made to define oneself and to express oneself by moving information from sections of the more hidden inner self to the ‘open’ section of the inner self. In a second language, this often requires more than a beginning knowledge of the new language.

Cultural differences in self-disclosure may be observed in some situations also. Javidi and Javidi (1994) wrote that there are often lower self-disclosure rates in Eastern cultures than there are in Western cultures. They explained that this may be due to people of Eastern cultures being more conditioned to concealing their thoughts, feelings, and

emotions for the purpose of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships with those around them, especially family.

Self-disclosure may also require a fairly high level of personal trust in the grammar of self. It may also involve high levels of feelings of safety with particular individuals in particular situations and contexts. Risks and communicative experiences with self-disclosure all contribute to the transforming grammar of self.

CLASSROOMS, TEACHERS AND THE GRAMMAR OF SELF

The grammar of self develops in many contexts, including second language learning classroom contexts. Due to this phenomenon it is of utmost importance that we as teachers of these classrooms realize the significance of our roles, and the effects of our attitudes and actions in the lives of the students. Teachers may be seen as highly significant persons in the lives of individual students, and teachers must therefore be ever watchful to handle that responsibility with interculturally sensitive care and compassion. Ellis (1991) noted that social and linguistic factors have shaped not only our teaching styles, but also the learning styles of many of the students. These factors must then be carefully examined, chosen, monitored, and evaluated in order that teachers may develop culturally sensitive strategies for dealing with intercultural differences and individual selves. Alexander (1985) suggested that teachers and learners must strive to direct energies out of familiar patterns and into new and unfamiliar paths for increased learning and development. There may be many strategies for approaching new and challenging situations, but cultural differences sometimes limit the choices. Nguyen (1991) however, suggested quite concisely that an English speaking person may give to an English learning person, much encouragement and positive feedback through smiles, genuine warmth and frequent reassurances about language performances.

Albert and Triandis (1994) also suggested some effective approaches for teachers of intercultural contexts. Culture-matching or student-sensitive strategies included: displaying expressions of approval and warmth; expressing confidence in a person's

ability to succeed; giving guidance; encouraging cooperation; stressing achievement for the family; eliciting expressions of feelings from the students; emphasizing global aspects of concepts; developing new diagnostic skills; using different emphasis for different students; and encouraging modeling of behaviors. FitzGerald (1996) noted a great need for more feed-back and clarifications of intentions in cross-cultural communication. This would enhance comprehension and alleviate negative evaluation of others. Through these various culturally sensitive approaches, the student's developing grammar of self may then be nurtured in more individualized, positive forms.

Often in classrooms, students are getting to know the teacher and how to relate well within the social and linguistic frameworks that the teacher provides, implicitly or explicitly. However, it is also important that the teacher engage in getting to know the individual students, and how to relate well to them at deeper levels. Lemke (1990) suggested that teachers need to know how their students' dialect or language differs from their own, and that special attention and credit may be given to different and unfamiliar ways of expression concerning the lessons. This may include a wide range of aspects such as vocabulary (written and oral), grammar, punctuation, meaning, associations, and organization (which may include varying thematic patterns). Or, as Cranmer-Byng and Kapadia (1912) noted that Confucius once said: "I will not be grieved that other men do not know me: I will be grieved that I do not know other men." With increased knowledge of the individual students, we as teachers may contribute to the enhancement of a positive and effective grammar of self, not only for each individual student, but for ourselves as well, as we learn from our students.

STORYING AND THE GRAMMAR OF SELF

In our endeavors to enrich the grammar of self in students, we as teachers must strive to incorporate cultural and ethnic aspects of each of our culturally diverse students in our second language classrooms. There are many creative ways of accomplishing this. One effective way is through "storying". "Storying" in the classroom may provide a wonderful approach for a healthy nurturing of the grammar of self in classrooms.

Storying, as developed and explained by Le (1988), involves the richness of listening to stories, the art of telling stories, and includes the environment or atmosphere where the story is being told. Students are not indoctrinated with particular cultural values and attitudes. Rather, they are provided with a context whereby they may explore linguistically rich experiences in vocabulary, dialect and style.

In the classroom context, we as teachers may wish to lend some insights into the particular activity, such as storying. A ‘sandwich’ approach may be of benefit, whereby a gentle suggestion may be sandwiched between various aspects of praise, at both the beginning and the end of the commentary. Praise from the teacher as well as other students, concerning social and linguistic choices within the storying experience, may provide the ‘storying student’ with new insights into the grammar of self, academically, linguistically, and socially. This may nurture feelings of connectedness in spirit, mind, body and intellect. This information or feed-back informs the developing grammar of self within the student, as to what is appropriate, acceptable, and enjoyable in a storying experience and in a second language context.

CONCLUSION

The “grammar of self” is influenced by many factors in our lives. Culture, context, and personality, along with second or other language learning may have dramatic effects upon the individualized views of personhood, or the grammar or rules, both linguistically and socially, that we incorporate into the grammar of self. Teachers and students alike, through ever-evolving, sensitive, intercultural identities may re-imagine, re-create, or re-invent, the ever transforming grammar of self. In this way, societies of this planet may become more compassionately linked through second language learning and through the intercultural communicative process.

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