

A comparison of English language learning and use by Balinese people involved in the tourist industry and refugee students.

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"Where you from?" "First time to Bali?" "Hey, You look, you buy?" "You want transport?" "Cheap price for you" ... were the words I commonly heard spoken on a recent trip to Bali, Indonesia. These repetitive comments spoken by locals caused me to think about their level of English language development, and, more importantly, how and why they would have developed these language skills. As an ESL teacher, teaching students who are mainly from a refugee background, it also made me consider how different groups would be likely to learn English in different ways and for different purposes.

Brown (2000) wrote that: "Communication may be regarded as a combination of acts, a series of elements with purpose and intent. Communication is not merely an event, with something that happens; it is functional, purposeful and designed to bring on some effect..." (p.250) This statement highlights the fact that the learner's purpose plays a significant part in language development. This assignment will look at the differences in learning a second language according to the learner's purpose. In other words, it will examine the way in which learners develop language skills in a second language depending on their need to learn and use the language. The language learning of two specific groups will be discussed and compared; firstly, a particular group of Balinese, that is, those involved in the tourist industry within their country, and secondly, refugee students, including those who are within the school system and older learners who are attending English lessons. In both these cases, the target language is English. It is important to note that, while individuals do learn a language at different rates and their experiences vary, the language learning and problems associated with this within these groups have been generalised.

It is useful to first look at how and why English is used in Bali, and more specifically in tourist areas such as Kuta, in order to make some assumptions as to how the majority of people involved in the tourist industry learn English.

Crystal (1997), in his book *English as a Global Language* wrote that: " Money talks very loudly in tourism – if only because the tourist has extra money to spend while on holiday. In tourist spots of the world, accordingly, the signs in the shop windows are most commonly in English. Restaurant menus tend to have a parallel version in English. Credit card facilities, such as American Express and MasterCard, are most noticeably in English. And among the destitute who haunt the tourist locations, the smattering of foreign language which is used to sell artefacts or beg money from the passing visitor is usually a pidgin form of English." (p.95-96) This is very much the case in Bali. In fact, in the tourist areas of Bali it has progressed even further than this in that it is not only the tourist touts, hotel staff or tourist guides who speak English, but a much wider cross-section of the public, including many of those who work in the service industry such as waiters, cleaners, taxi drivers and shop keepers. The point that Crystal made

regarding money as the prime motivation to learn English is particularly true in Bali. Without English, or at least another foreign language, few of the people in the Balinese tourist industry would be able to survive. English is their 'draw card' to earn more money and in turn lead a more comfortable life.

For most Balinese who speak English, however, their English is fairly limited. It is not quite the 'pidgin' English that Crystal (1997) refers to, but their English vocabulary is often centred around their profession. This is especially true for those who work in the retail industry, whether they be street touts, stall owners or sales assistants in more westernised shops. These sales people appeared to have a particular set of language rules, vocabulary and even non-verbal methods of communication. That is, they used a specific genre to communicate with the tourists. The term genre is used to describe the language that accompanies or facilitates a social process. Painter (1988) states that there are three aspects to genre: any genre pertains to a particular culture and its social institutions; the social processes are purposeful and it usually takes a number of steps to achieve ones purpose. (p.1)

The genre of 'selling' used by many Balinese in the tourist industry, has a number of identifiable characteristics. These are not just limited to this particular community; in fact, similar sales tactics and language use can be seen in countries where tourism plays a large part in the economic infrastructure all over the world. More importantly, a similar genre can be seen in tourist areas in other countries where the seller is speaking another language in order to communicate with the buyer. Mark Le (2004) sums this up well in his comment: "The speech act of selling takes on a new meaning when the seller's first language is not that of the speaker, having to adopt a new language and the rules that bind it." "The ... act involves cooperation by participants, and is not just a sharing of ideas or statements in a haphazard way as it may appear to the onlooker; on the contrary, it has an underlying structure and is built on a predictable framework" (p.4) Le (2000) outlined a whole range of communicative characteristics used by street kids in Vietnam. Some of these are similar to the communicative behaviours used in the tourist areas of Bali, such as communicative enthusiasm (where the sales people are genuinely interested in communicating with the tourists), code-switching (the act of swapping from one language to another in order to engage in a conversation with a group of tourists), stereotypical speech (the use of fixed words and expressions), as communicative enthusiasm (the use of linguistic strategies to persuade tourists to buy their wares or employ their services).

During the time I was in Bali I witnessed all of these communicative behaviours highlighted by Le (2000). These were used frequently by the sales people in Bali, and they were often used in conjunction with each other. Many of the Balinese were enthusiastic in their approach and they were able to choose the language that they thought was appropriate for a particular group of tourists (mostly English) to advertise their products using stereotypical speech. A more specific example is the girls hanging around the shopping centres and beach area who attempt to gain your attention initially by asking "Where you from?" Once they gain your attention they quickly add to this "Paint your nails, plait your hair?" If you agree to employ their services, they then engage in a conversation with you, which usually involves finding out whether you would like to visit their friend's shop or whether you need transport for the following day.

In terms of communicative enthusiasm in sales encounters in Bali, in some instances the enthusiasm surrounding the communication was genuine in that the sales person was keen to continue the interaction, but on other occasions their prime motivation was to make a sale and once this was accomplished then the sales person was happy to end the encounter. Code switching was a technique often used by the sales people in Bali. In some cases they knew a few words in other languages, not just English, particularly phrases like, "You buy?" They often attempted to predict tourist's nationalities and then speak accordingly. In most cases, however, English was the main language used. Similarly, they were able to switch from Balinese to English easily depending on whom they were talking to. Stereotypical language usually in the form of advertising products and services, such as those examples listed at the start of this essay, were very commonly used amongst the sales people. In fact, so much so that the repetitive comments often became a source of annoyance for tourists after a short period of time.

As mentioned previously, the language habits of the Balinese people involved in the tourist industry have been generalised. Not all of these people have limited English skills. In fact, whilst on holiday I did meet a few Balinese with well developed English skills. I noticed that tour guides and taxi drivers, in particular, were able to talk about a more diverse range of topics and they had a better vocabulary and grasp of grammar. This was possibly due to the fact that they would have had more opportunity to engage in longer conversations with tourists, as well as clarify meanings and work on their grammatical structure as they spent longer durations of time due to the nature of their job. They may also have had a better education allowing them to gain a higher level of English proficiency. Also some of the men who worked in stalls or at bars seemed to have good English skills, but they were often seen to be fraternising with tourists, which may explain their higher level of language development. It is important to note that these were purely my observations; no studies have been found to prove the assumptions I have made. This leads us to consider the notion of how most of the Balinese would have learned English. Firstly, it is necessary to look at the linguistic background of the Balinese people.

In relation to language usage in Bali, The Lonely Planet guide 'South- East Asia on a shoestring' states that: "English is understood in all of the tourist centres, and Bahasa Indonesian is widely used all over Bali. The local Balinese language is completely different and almost impossible for a foreigner to come to grips with. It's not a written language, and there is considerable variation from one part of the island to another. (p.192) This information indicates that most Balinese are bilingual, as they speak their regional language Balinese and the national language, Indonesian. Those people who are also able to speak English or another foreign language are, in fact, multilingual. Valdes mentioned that "... few nations are either monolingual or mono-ethnic. Each of the world's nations has groups of individuals living within its borders who use other languages in addition to the national language to function in their everyday lives. (p.1) From this statement it would appear, then, that the Balinese are not alone, in that many countries of the world rely on an additional language or languages to assist with everyday functioning.

Apparently Indonesian is the language taught in schools, and outside of school amongst family and friends Balinese is the common language used. English is taught in schools, and according to some of the people's accounts of learning English in school, it is taught in a fairly formal manner. It is hard to ascertain what percentage of population have had access to some kind of

schooling, and therefore the level of English reached by most Balinese before they left the more formal setting of the classroom. Many of the Balinese who spoke English, however, commented that most of their English language learning did not take place in a classroom; they learnt English from talking to tourists.

For the majority of Balinese involved in the tourist industry, English was learned from listening and speaking. Since English is a necessary part of achieving success in their line of work it, many of these people would have been highly motivated to learn English. Like the Balinese, Mark Lee (2004) documented that motivation was an important factor in the learning of English by street kids in Vietnam. He wrote that: "To them, learning English incorporated a conscious element, a means to achieve a goal. The basis of their language learning and functioning was financially motivated. In other words, if they didn't learn some English (the language of the tourist) they could not obtain money to help their family. Learning a foreign language did not appear their primary consideration or motivation." (p.10) For the Balinese involved in the tourist industry, then, like those documented in the Vietnamese study, English would have been likely to have been learned as a means to provide an income rather than purely for interest.

Since the goal of many of these Balinese was to develop English skills that were at least sufficient to allow them to function satisfactorily in their business dealings, one would assume that the primary focus was on verbal modes as opposed to reading and writing. Those Balinese working in the tourist industry, then, would have been likely to have developed their verbal skills through listening to other stall holders or taxi drivers speaking with tourists, and practicing their own talking and listening skills with tourists. In addition to this, English is not only spoken widely around Bali but there are many other forms of verbal and written English that are assessable, for example, pop music, cable television, and advertising in the form of posters, billboards and shop signs. In fact, English is everywhere in the touristy areas of Bali.

To be able to function appropriately within a particular business centred around tourism, those people working in the area would need to build up a relevant a bank of words. Saville-Troike (1982) stated that vocabulary development "... reflects to a certain degree the ordering of priorities within a culture." (p.219) If we take the culture mentioned here to mean the tourist culture within the realms of the Balinese culture, then we could make the assumption that those people working within the tourist industry in service and sales, would be likely to have learned a vocabulary associated with serving, selling and the produce that they have for sale. That is, their vocabulary development would have been prioritised. Once a sufficient bank of words had been learned, any additional words learned would be useful, but not essential.

Whilst developing a vocabulary of English words through listening and speaking to tourists and other Balinese involved in the tourist industry, grammatical skills would have been learned incidentally. Since many Balinese may not have had the opportunity to develop their English to a higher level within the more formal structure provided at school, much of their grammatical and literacy skills would have been learned "on the job".

Let us now look at the language learning and use by people who have come to Australia as refugees. That is, those people who have been forced to leave,

and are unable to return to, their country of origin due to an unsafe and unstable environment, who have often been living in refugee camps for long periods of time and who have been given permanent residency by the Australian Government. Some refugees are taught English in a refugee camp before they enter Australia, but the majority arrive in Australia with only a few basic words in English. For these refugees, particularly the children who are immersed in a school environment for a large proportion of the day, they usually learn English relatively quickly as they are surrounded by English. In addition to this they have a real need to learn English, as without it they would find it very difficult to participate fully in everyday life. English is necessary to be able to engage in many social, economic and practical matters.

Refugees are provided with good opportunities to learn English in Australia. Soon after arrival most refugee children are enrolled in schools or child-care centres where they begin to learn English through both structured teaching and from interacting with their peers. All adult refugees are entitled to free English classes through the TAFE system, where various levels of language and literacy ability are catered for. Both adults and children from a refugee background have access to learning spoken and written English. It is not like learning English as a foreign language where English is solely learned in the classroom, as the refugee learners have an opportunity to practice their language skills when operating within the wider community. The refugee learners, therefore, develop their English skills through a balance of structure and incidental learning.

While people from a refugee background may learn English fairly quickly due to their immersion in the environment, English is not the only skill they have to learn. In fact, they need to learn a whole range of skills in order to adapt to their new environment. For many refugees, this can prove to be very difficult initially and it often results in 'culture shock'. This is a term defined by Schumann (1988) as the "...anxiety resulting from disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture." (p.4) In other words, it is the stress created by the loss of familiar surroundings, methods of communicating and cultural norms. Refugees, then, often have to deal with a number of issues soon after their arrival, including adjusting to the new culture, general resettlement matters and coping with the trauma associated with leaving loved ones behind and in some cases, having witnessed unspeakable atrocities in the past. Crock and Saul (2002) outlined some of the main factors that are needed to help refugees adapt to life in another country. They included: access to employment, education and services to improve their English skills; support from people with similar backgrounds; support from, and reunification with, family members; access to health services and appropriate housing. (p.15-16) It can be seen then, that learning English is just one of the many concerns of recently arrived refugees.

From the examination of the language use and language learning of these two separate groups, a few linguistic and cultural differences and similarities have emerged. There are a few characteristics common to both groups, in that most Balinese and refugee people are either bilingual or multilingual, and both groups had a great deal of motivation to learn English. Other than these characteristics the groups are quite different from each other. While both groups more than likely passed through similar stages of development when they were in the process of learning English, the way in which they learned the language and the degree to which they needed to master the language is different.

One of the most obvious similarities is that both these groups are learning English to be able to function adequately in society. That is, their purpose is functional. The degree to which they need to develop their language differs however. To be able to gain enough money to survive in Bali, an individual needs to possess basic English skills; to progress further up the ladder a reasonably high level of spoken English, and some skills in reading and writing in English would be beneficial. For a refugee student to achieve success in Australia, however, a high standard of academic English including verbal, reading and writing skills, is necessary. Taylor wrote that: "Without competence in standard English, students will fail academically and face diminished career, social and life options." (Ch.3, p.2) The intent of both groups is the same if you consider they both want to learn English, however, the degree to which they need to master the language differs. While it is of benefit to have a higher level of English skills in both communities, the refugees in Australia would find that they have far fewer opportunities if they have achieved less success in English, since they are living in an English speaking community.

Both those involved in the Balinese tourist industry and refugees living in Australia learn English, to some extent, in context. Halliday (1991) used the term 'context' to describe the additional background cues that help one to understand the desired meaning in linguistic encounters. He stated that "The context is some sort of environment; it is what is going on around, where language is somehow involved." (p.2) In the case of the Balinese, they have an understanding of the particular tourist culture established within the Balinese setting. That is, they have a knowledge of "tourist behaviour" and the genre of shopping or touring associated with this. Their English language skills have been developed in this context. Similarly, many of the Balinese have learned about English speaking countries through tourists accounts, however, few Balinese have actually travelled and gained a first hand glimpse at a country where English is the first language. This means that few Balinese have actually learned English in the context of a totally English speaking environment, thus their knowledge of English may be missing many of the cultural idiosyncrasies of the language. Most refugees, on the other hand, learn English completely in context since it is necessary to use English both in the classroom setting and in their everyday affairs. Brown (2000) commented that "...learning a second language implies some degree of learning a second culture..." (p.182). This is true for both groups, then, it is just that the cultural reference for both groups is quite different.

Refugees who have learned English in context have had to gain mastery of a number of different genres, or learned how to operate both linguistically and socially in a variety of different situations. For those Balinese involved in the tourist industry, however, it has only been necessary to learn and function within one genre in English. They have only needed to learn the rules or common strategies, such as using communicative enthusiasm, code-switching, stereotypical speech and linguistic advertising, that need to be adhered to when involved in a transaction with tourists, in their own country.

Hymes (1967, 1972) coined the term communicative competence, which refers to an individuals capacity to "...convey and interpret messages and negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts." (in Brown (2000), p.246) Canale and Swaine (1980, 1983) outlined four different components that describe a person who is communicatively competent. These are: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. (in Brown (2000), p.247) When looking at the language learning of the two different groups it is possible to

see that those Balinese who dealt with tourists were proficient in the last two categories, however, many lacked a thorough grasp of English grammar and a more in-depth knowledge of a range of genre patterns. Whereas, for refugees who have learned English in the context of an English speaking country and with access to formal schooling as well as a means to practice their language naturally, have gained a better grasp of all of these components of communicative competency.

The aim of this discussion has been to examine some of the differences in language learning and use depending on the purpose or need for the individual to learn English. As we can see then, for those Balinese who work within the tourist industry in their country, many have learned English through talking and listening to tourists and other English speakers. Unlike the refugees learning English in Australia, however, the Balinese have been able to carry out this learning in a safe context, that is, with limited treatment of damaging their ego should mistakes be made, and without the stress associated with adjusting to a new country and culture. Since the language learning for these Balinese did not take place in an entirely English speaking context, however, their language skills would be likely to be lacking in some areas. That is, most Balinese would not have been able to learn the social and linguistic discourse patterns necessary to operate in a range of different situations or genres within an English speaking country, and their level of English development would be likely to be limited due to their lack of access to education and resources needed to reach a higher level of language functioning. The English language learning in both of these cases, therefore, was quite different to each other in many ways, however, one key factor regarding purpose was the same for both groups; they were both very motivated to learn English in order to gain a better life for themselves and their families.

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