EGO-CENTRICISM AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN IRANIAN YOUNG ADULTS' LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT. This introspective paper proves Iranian young adults' ego-centricism and its cognitive functioning an encumbrance in English language learning. Thru a brief look at the initiation of language acquisition in children and the generalizibility to language teaching and learning programs, it is realized that the ego of every learner is the main axis of their language articulation. Plus, as nervousness is an indispensable trait in language production, learners, unconsciously and as one's nature decrees, put themselves at ease by giving egoistic and—at the same time—positive language articulation. These two traits are both looked high upon, but in cases they go hand in hand to make prominent the role of a teacher to have power over this by means of various and ever changing techniques of teaching.

A Brief Discussion on Ego-centricism and Persian as a Self-centered Language;

Excessively fixated on one's own thoughts and beliefs, ego-centricism is a rising-to-its-peak characteristic in young adults. This trait manifests most in case of language articulation—speaking and writing; as with Iranian language learners, articulations with the centrality of the word '*I*' are made. Young adults are at a turning point of their lives in which some main part of their fixed and fixated personality is made. So, it would be absolutely normal if they committed specific deeds. Being arrogant or humble, funny or serious is all due, mostly, to their want to be the locus of attention. They think others are attentive to and enthusiastically interested in their thoughts and beliefs. As a result, this feeling gives rise to egotism—a personality trait in which one talks about themselves sometimes to the point of being disliked. Although on a few number of monotonous variations, the main axis of such articulations in young adults is the very ego of the person. This is also partially because of their self-centered language. Presumably, as Robert F. Rycek et al. put it in their article of *Adolescent Ego-centricism and Cognitive Functioning during Late Adolescence*, they think as they respect their thoughts and built up beliefs, others should do the same disregarding times they are inattentive toward others. Mentally speaking, they make an imaginary audience to whom they talk; this ends in an increase in self-consciousness and self-confidence, but all if conducted well. This will be elaborated on later.

As Elkind (1967) proposed, "Adolescent ego-centricism, which includes a belief by teenagers that they are special and unique, accompanies the attainment of new mental abilities." Language is a mental capability of expressing what one wants to say; the ability to learn a language will never atrophy nor will the ability to articulate it. Consequently, these two definitions with no slightest mismatch go true with language— English in this case—teaching and learning classes. That is, ego-centricism is an

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inseparable feature of language articulation in these classes. In some measure, although mentally useful, observations show that ego-centricism could strongly be a hindrance in language learning. Learners gradually build up a self-bound articulation framework; this will, with time elapsing, thwart them from language generalizibility, and thus, efficient language learning.

Based on cognitive psychology, in full contrast to behaviorism, learners are to build up their memories and fit it with language experiences thru *equilibration*, *assimilation*, and *accommodation* processes respectively. It, ego-centricism, then fully affects language articulation in Iranian learners. Another language feature which has a leading role in articulation and aggravates the situation is that Persian is a self-centered language; demonstrated not age-bound, this Persian language feature arises as a result of the centrality of one's self when articulating language. Should this be controlled, cognitive functioning of ego-centricism, which includes the centrality of the word '*I*' in articulations due to the factors above—ego-centricism and self-centered native tongue, is to be directed in the right path by the teachers.

Language Articulation in Young Adults;

Language articulation is discussed within the limits of classroom teaching and learning processes whereas to study this, as Robert McLeod once put it forth, one should start with babies (Bridgeman 2003: p. 225); that is, their acquisition of first language. Therefore, an epigrammatic look at this would be of benefit.

It goes without saying that every baby inherits some neural structures; he then experiences a wide range of sound signals, sign language, and sentences in their whereabouts. Studies show that this acquisition includes some specific phases. First two phases are *cooing* and *babbling* in which a baby makes single sounds and single syllable-type sounds respectively. Afterward, acquisition follows *holophrastic* phase. This is when the baby expresses a whole meaning thru a single word; that is, a single word conveys the whole intended message. The last pre-language phase is called *telegraphic* phase; this phase is characterized by a chain of morphemes which are thought to be the key and, indeed, gist of the message (Bridgeman 2003: pp. 225-233) (Yule 2003: pp. 175-189). Meanwhile, one should bear in mind that the baby is exposed to cultural and social inputs besides all bio-genetically inherent traits regarding the language and its culture. They fit outer experience with inner language capability and store them all in their cognition of language knowledge.

To some extent, the process described above applies to the observations of language articulation in learners. But, primitively, a psychological framework should be adapted.

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To do this, cognitive psychology is taken into account. In complete contrary with behaviorism, cognitive psychology's viewpoint toward learning—learning language in this case—takes into account the involvement of memory in interaction between language input and language experience. According to observations, language articulation embraces two distinct phases: (1) message planning, and (2) message articulation.

When a learner comes to articulate language, primitively they think of the to-be-conveyed message in their cognition. Having found the words, they plan it; that is, they make an effort to give linguistic form and orderliness to it. But as above, Persian is a self-centered language. That is, when addressing others, Persian speakers put themselves in the center of utterances. This is unlike English which is destination-centered. It is shown in a simple example bellow; [the Persian sentence is a word by word translation.]

While going to the movies, one sees a friend:

Persian: Do you come with me?

English: Do you go with me?

This proves it true that Iranian language learners think in Persian, a self-centered language, before articulation. This trait plus young adults' ego-centricism go hand in hand to settle the dominance of the word '*I*' or '*I-related words*'.

When this message is fully organized, it is then time for it to be put in terms; that is, afterward, the learner puts the message into linguistic form and articulates it for the audience.

An observation was designed to examine the two traits'—ego-centricism and self-centricism—rate in language articulation of the learners.

The Observation;

Participants were 78 Iranian English learners (all male learners) ranging in age from 13 to 29; with the exception of 10 who were above the highest age; this was to examine the traits if age-bound. Participants were all recruited from different English classes in a language institute in Zanjan. They were asked to write 10 sentences including affirmatives and negatives, but not questions in *present simple* and *past simple*. Above all, they were told to use all subjects.

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The results were astonishing. The percentage of I-centered and I-related articulations among the totality, proved the two traits identical; that is, they are effective in language articulation almost to the same extent—each in its own position. Plus, ego-centricism was demonstrated not age-bound as above.

The table bellow shows the observation results in age ranges and factors alike;

Table 1.
Observation results on ego-centric and I-related articulations

Age Ranges	Number of Participants	Number of Sentences	Percentage of ego-centric articulations	Percentage of I-related articulations
13-16	32	320	43.43 %	11.25 %
17-20	23	230	46.10 %	12.10 %
21+	23	230	50.43 %	9.60 %

Ego-centricism and Nervousness interaction;

What which could be of significant priority is not necessarily language articulation, but some features behind with which the learners blindly put themselves at ease;

At the outset, comes the learners' ego-centricism. This trait is of the utmost importance due, in part, to their intrinsic want of being the center of attention; as already mentioned, young adults are self-centered and know more about their very personal worlds than that of others. Most of their language articulation takes account of their very centrality. It is even observed that they seek superiority over others; an example is shown bellow;

Frequently Observed Articulation: *Ali is my friend.*

Never Observed Articulation: *I am a friend of Ali's.*

They prefer to have the possession, not to be possessed. This will, in many cases, prevent them from language generalizibility; that is, they do not—if no persuasion on teacher's behalf—use other subjects, and thus, do not make necessary changes in a given sentence. This will gradually fossilize in their cognition the correction of which could be easier said than done and without a solution in cases. But the learners do so as they find it easier.

Nervousness is the next indispensable factor. As the major cause of the injection of adrenaline in blood, nervousness helps one to do their best to accomplish what they want.

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According to Lata and Kumar (2007: p. 23), "Nervousness to a little extent is a healthy sign as the speaker gets 'psyched up' for a good performance. Therefore, it is perfectly normal to be nervous before [language articulation]." But to exceed that little kind extent, this healthy sign turns out to be some sort of fear compelling one subconsciously look for ways to be at ease. Thus, the learners tend to use affirmatives—they are easier to make—with the centrality of '*I*' which is aptly named a double-trouble; conventionally and here.

These two inseparable traits accompany Iranian language learners and slowly but surely take root in their cognition; that is, they frequently occur in language articulation of a learner during the processes of equilibration, assimilation, and accommodation.

Jean Piaget;

Jean Piaget, a prominent figure in cognitive developmental psychology, has fully, in his writings, emphasized constructivism; constructivism lets individuals connect external facts and their personal sense of meaning to pave their own path of understanding (Williams and Burden 2000: p. 21). Language learners are exposed to a given language as they already know their native tongue and its construction. Accordingly, passing thru some stages, they make the same connection with the experience of foreign language learning.

The developing mind is viewed as constantly seeking *equilibration*; that is, a balance between what is known and is currently being experienced. This is accomplished by the complementary processes of *assimilation* and *accommodation*. Put simply, assimilation is the process by which incoming information is changed or modified in our minds so that we can fit it with what we already know. Accommodation, on the other hand, is the process by which we modify what we already know to take into account new information. Working in conjunction, these two processes contribute to what Piaget terms the central process of cognitive *adaptation*. This is an essential aspect of learning, and one that is particularly relevant to the learning of the grammar of a new language (Williams and Burden 2000: p. 22).

Hence, Iranian learners build up their native tongue construction while acquiring it and when they come to learning English, they exert the same processes basically founded in Persian, completely a foreign one to English. Consequently, they get into trouble when haphazardly go for the articulation the basis of which is Persian. Again the two traits manifest here as encumbrances in way of language articulation as it should be.

Bellow is two pictures showing the complementary processes of assimilation and accommodation;

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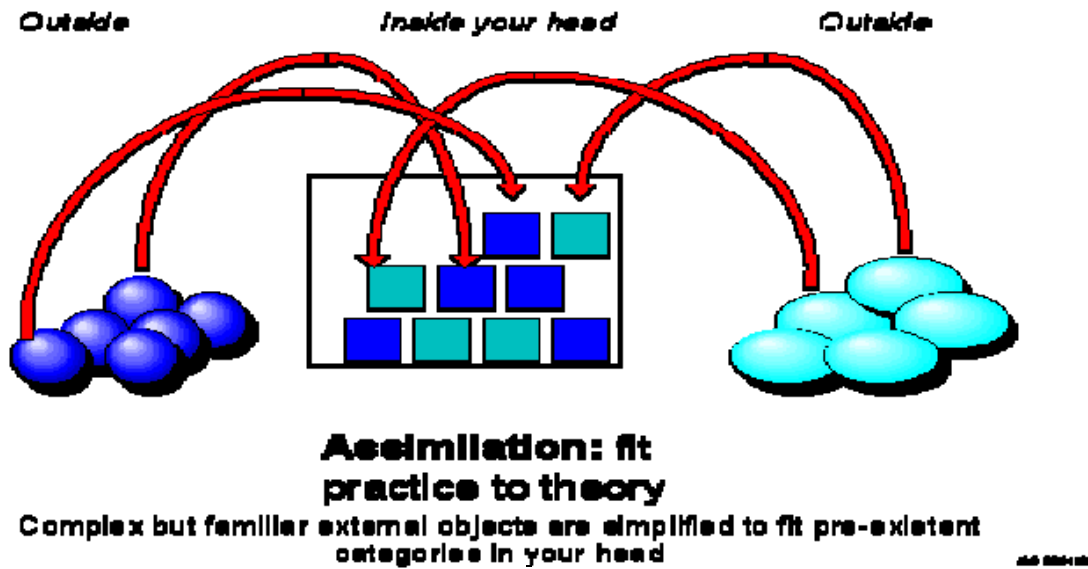University of Zanjan
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Figure 1. Assimilation process retrieved from www.learningandteaching.info/learning/cognitive.htm

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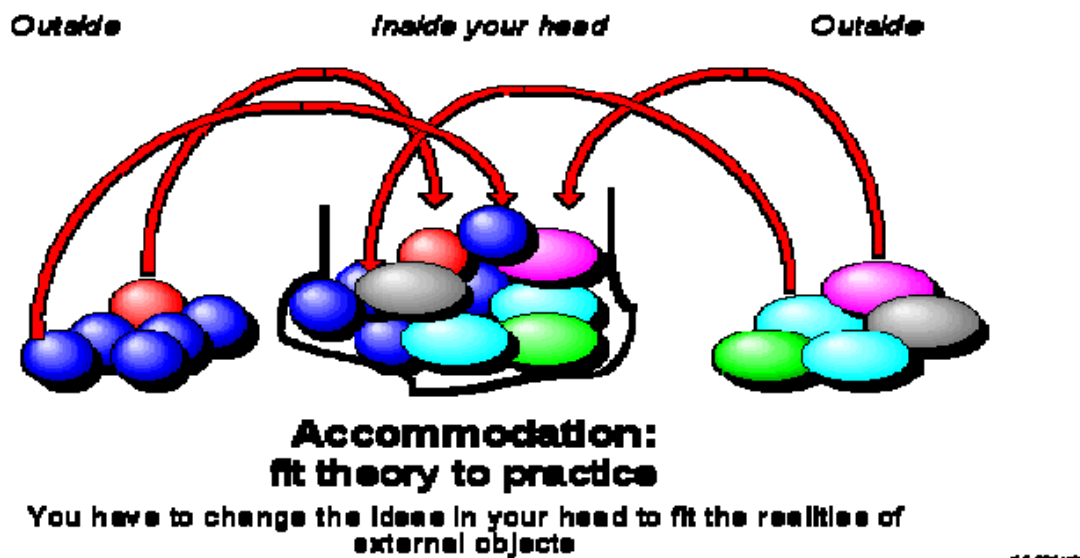University of Zanjan
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Figure 2. Accommodation process retrieved from www.learningandteaching.info/learning/cognitive.htm

The Role of Teachers;

Unquestionably, teachers hold leading roles in supervision over the two traits. It manifests most, if truth be told, when teachers teach. Iranian young adults prefer to be taught thru examples; that is, they would like to be taught inductively to form general rules and main values of English. Seemingly an inherent attribute in all Iranians, ego-centricism—already proven not age-abound (see Table 1)—roots in every Persian speaker not withstanding the fact that Persian is self-centered; then, it would be utterly normal if a Persian speaker English teacher commenced their exemplification with I-centered and I-related articulations. This would give the same insight to the learners to cognitively build up what their teachers construct as language patterns for them. Although inherent, as teachers are taken for granted when providing linguistic patterns, this trait should be tamed not to be recalcitrant. In the process of being exposed to language articulation by the teachers, therefore, it would be of high significance for the teachers to use not only examples focused on idiosyncratic subjects, but also a vast range of other sorts. This, in addition to making the learners get used to receiving and, as a result, constructing even unheard articulations, gives them encyclopedic knowledge to help them with upcoming matters related to language learning.

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Conclusion;

Ego-centricism, psychologically looking at the term, is the stimulant engine which makes one grow their self-confidence and self-consciousness specifically whilst articulating language to an audience—real or their self-styled '*imaginary audience*'. It is desirable to grow this sense in young adults, but if excessively paid attention to, it turns out to be an encumbrance. This is aggregated when their self-centered native tongue's cognitive structure, which is already built up in their cognition, declares itself to currently being received cognitive structure; it is the case of foreign language learning. It is subsequently the role of the teachers not to allow these cognitive traits to be exerted in language learning process of Iranian learners ending in such excessively ego-centric language articulation.

It is, however, open to question. Iranian language learners would in cases—as obviously observed—unconsciously suffer from a basically of assistance personality trait.

This paper did not observe how effective ego-centricism could be in language learning, and it could not be in case of Iranian language learners, but it might be proven effective someday.

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