COMPENSATORY STRATEGIES OF FIRST-LANGUAGE-ATTRITED CHILDREN

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Abstract: This article explores the compensatory strategies used by two Indonesian children who experienced first language attrition when acquiring English in the English-speaking environment. They use compensatory strategies to compensate for their lack of competence in first language. They employ both interlingual strategies and discourse strategies when they have difficulties in communication. Interlingual strategies used are codeswitching and lexical borrowings and the discourse strategies are overt comments, appeal for assistance, and avoidance.

Key words: language attrition, compensatory strategies, sociolinguistics, language pedagogy

Language attrition or loss is a common phenomenon experienced by bilingual speakers regardless of their age. A growing body of research in language attrition, both in second and first language loss, has proliferated. Seliger and Vago (1991) bring together articles in a volume that investigates first language attrition from various angles, such as first language attrition in societal bilingualism or group of bilingual individuals and single bilingual subjects, both children and adults.

The loss of language skills in first language occurs as the result of restricted use of the language (Pan & Gleason, 1986). Such restrictions may occur when a speaker of one language moves to a place where another language is dominant. In this situation, one will gradually become a bilingual as s/he acquires second language competence which may also affects his or her linguistic abilities in the first language. This attrition or loss may also have sociolinguis-

tic as well as linguistic effects, such as in phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and lexicon. First language attrition may also occur even though the speaker continues to use the language for a daily discourse function, such as in the family who live in the environment where another language is dominant (Huffines, 1991). Ohlstain and Barzilay (1991) state that the extent to which attrition takes place in one's competence in his or her first language depends on, among other things, the prestige of the first language in the new environment and the degree of acculturation of the speaker into the new speech community. De Bot and Hulsen (2002) add some factors, such as the differences in speakers' language background, educational level, attitudes towards L1 and L2, professional activity and age of the time of migration play a role in the first language attrition. In addition, De Bot in De Bot and Hulsen (2002) indicates that a failure to recall a word may be caused by insufficient exposure to the language. However, Weltens in De Bot and Hulsten (2002), based on a research conducted to adult Dutch speakers learning French argues that the loss of French competence does not relate to training level nor to period of non use but it may be caused by the fact that the subjects of the research are adults who have already attained the critical threshold. In terms of recalling lexical items, Ammerlaan in De Bot and Hulsen (2002: 256) states that "a failure to recollect specific words does not necessarily indicate permanent unavailability, ...but rather a temporary unavailability of the desired lexical items". From a different angle, Levy and Anderson (2007) report that their adult subjects' less use of first language does not make them forget the language but it is temporary forgetfulness which may be an adaptive strategy to learn a second language better.

A first-language-attrited speaker may find difficulties in communicating his or her messages to other speakers. S/he will resort to communication strategies, particularly to compensatory strategies to compensate for his or her lack in competence in the first language. This paper attempts to describe first language attrition of two Indonesian children by focusing particularly on the question: What strategies are used by first-language-attrited children to compensate their lack of linguistic repertoire in their first language? More specifically, the data are used to seek answers to the following questions. First, do the children use more inter-lingual strategies, intra-lingual strategies or discourse strategies in coping with their first language deficiencies? Second, are there any differences in the use of compensatory strategies between the two children? Finally, if so, does competence in first language play a role?

There are some significances of research in this area as follows. Firstly, the research provides an insight into the nature of language attrition in children in general, and particularly into how first-language-attrited children cope with their lack of linguistic repertoire in their first language. Secondly, it enables the teachers, researchers as well as those who are involved in language education to anticipate the loss of language skills in first language.

The term compensatory-strategies comes under the broader term communication strategies. The communication strategies are strategies employed by first or second language learners to overcome their deficiencies in the language. They are shared strategies that both speaker and hearer resorted to where things go wrong in the communication. Tarone (1980: 420) defines them as: "mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in a situation where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared". They include paraphrases, avoidance, and transfer. In contrast to Tarone, Faerch and Kasper (1983: 81) define communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal". According to them, communication strategies include achievement strategies and avoidance strategies. The former is divided into non-cooperative strategies and cooperative strategies, and the latter into formal reduction and functional reduction. Although Tarone's view of the communication strategies shares some aspects of the strategies with that of Faerch and Kasper's, they differ in perspective. Tarone's view is more sociolinguistic oriented involving both speaker and hearer to work out the communication problems while Faerch and Kasper's view is psycholinguistic in nature in which they view communication strategies as individual processing problems.

Poulisse (1987) notes that achievement strategies are further divided into retrieval strategies and compensatory strategies. According to Kellerman et al. (1990) compensatory strategies refer to the ways in which second language users compensate for not knowing a word in the second language. Furthermore, Andersen (1982) organizes compensatory strategies into three general categories, namely, paraphrasing and circumlocution, lexical borrowing and innovations, and morphosyntactic transfer and innovations. Paraphrasing and circumlocution "constitutes (sic) various ways to get around failure to remember a word, the correct phrasing, the right pronunciation, morphological marking or syntax" (p.104). In relation to lexical borrowings and lexical innovations, Andersen (1982) states that when the language users have inadequate lexical repertoire to express a certain meaning, they will borrow lexical items from anoth-

er language and adapt them to the phonology, lexicon, semantics, and morpho-syntactic structure of the borrowing language, and "to create new lexical items, usually modeled either on the language being spoken …. another language known by the speaker" (p.106). Morphosyntactic transfer and innovations are related to "reliance on a second language to maintain or buttress the morphosyntactic marking that is being eroded" (p. 105).

The literature discussed above concerns communication and compensatory strategies in second language attrition. Turian and Alternberg (1991), interestingly apply those concepts of compensatory strategies of second language attrition into first language attrition. They propose a different taxonomy of compensatory strategies based on Poulisse et al. which includes interlingual strategies, intralingual strategies, and discourse strategies. They refer to interlingual strategies to those proposed by Poulisse et al. as "a strategy which results in the interpolation of another language, either the learner's native language or another foreign language" (Turian & Alternberg, 1991: 212). Interlingual strategies include code switching, lexical borrowing, and syntactic transfer. In addition to this, the writer includes code mixing as one of the interlingual strategies. Codeswitching is defined as the alternation of two languages between sentences (intersentential) and codemixing as the alternation of two languages within a sentence (intrasentential). The inclusion of both codeswitching and codemixing as compensatory strategies if they are used by the speakers to fill in their lexical gaps as Silva-Corvalan (1988) points out that generally, codemixing is used to fill lexical gaps for speakers who are on the lower end of a bilingual continuum. It is the notion of codemixing that the writer embraces although Kamwamangalu (1992) states that codemixing is different from borrowing in that the latter occurs to fill lexical gaps while the former has no such feature. Thus, the lexical borrowing is defined as "borrowing lexical items from another language, usually adapting the lexical item to the phonological, lexical, semantic, morphosyntactic structure of the borrowing language" (Andersen, 1982: 106). Turian and Alternberg (1991: 213) refer to syntactic structure to "syntactic constructions based on the syntax of another language", and they use the definition of intralingual strategies of Poulisse et al. that say: "a strategy occurring in L1 and L2 speech, the use of which is not bound to the particular linguistic form of a given language, but reflects general approaches to solving linguistic problems" (p.214). These strategies include analogical leveling, lexical innovation, and approximation. Analogical leveling refers to Andersen's (1982: 103) who states " a highly regular form or construction will be

chosen to replace an irregular form or construction", lexical innovation is defined as the creation of new lexical items usually modeled on either language known to the speaker or language being spoken. And approximation is taken from Poulisse et al.'s definition that says: "the use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure which the learner knows is not correct but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the learner" (quoted from Turian and Alternberg, 1991: 214).

Discourse strategies are defined as "language based strategies which are not interlingual or intralingual" (Turian & Alternberg, 1991: 214), These strategies focus on the interlocutors interaction, and they are divided into overt comments, appeal for assistance, deliberate wrong answers, and avoidance. Overt comments are defined as comments that the speaker makes concerning his or her linguistic deficiencies, and deliberate wrong answers are wrong answers that are expressed using second language when the subject does not know a particular word in his or her first language. Poulisse et al. in Turian & Alternberg (1991: 215) defines appeal for assistance as "the learner asks for the correct term", and avoidance as "a strategy of getting around target language rules or forms which are not yet an established part of the learner's competence".

Several studies have dealt with some aspects of compensatory strategies described above. Turian & Alternberg (1991) find out that the subject, a three-year-old boy uses all strategies mentioned above. The subject uses interlingual strategies, such as codeswitching, lexical borrowing, and syntactic transfer. As intralingual strategies, the subject uses analogical leveling, lexical innovation and approximation, and he also uses overt comments, deliberate wrong answers, appeal for assistance, and avoidance as discourse strategies. In relation to avoidance, Schachter's subjects (1974), Chinese and Japanese adults, avoid using a specific syntactic construction, such as postnominal relative clauses because their first language does not have this kind of syntactic construction, and it is difficult for them to produce. Thus, this avoidance is due to the difficulty of the construction for the subjects. Similar to Schachter's findings, Grosjean (1982) notes bilingual children repeatedly avoid difficult words and construction in the weaker language. Moreover, Andersen in Paradis (2007) confirms that Spanish children who acquires English as a second language in the United States of America use lexical borrowing and codeswitching as compensatory atrategies when they do not know the precise words in Spanish.

METHOD

The subjects used in the research are two Indonesian children who stayed and acquired English in the United States of America. When they arrived in the USA they spoke no English at all. Upon arrival, the girl was 8.4 years old, and the boy was 4.7 years old. The girl started her third grade two months after she arrived while the boy who had attended preschool for one year in his home country did not want to go to preschool. Instead, he enjoyed spending most of his time at home watching television programs, such as *Sesame Street*, *Mr. Rodger's Neighbors*, *Barney*, *Power Rangers* and cartoons. The girl had been exposed to English through speaking with her schoolmates; yet, she spent most of her after school hours with two other Indonesian children. However, she gradually interacted with other English speaking children in the neighborhood. The boy attended preschool with little push from his parents but after one month he quit because he did not like to go to school. At the age of 5.8 he started kindergarten and he seemed to like it and he did not want to miss a single day. Even he wanted to go to school earlier than he was supposed to. Although he had interacted quite intensively with other English speaking children since he went to kindergarten he still enjoyed watching television programs at home. Several months after he started kindergarten he began to interact with neighboring children very intensively. However, he still did not want to miss his favorite television programs.

When asked about their school, the subjects said that they liked their school very much. The boy mentioned three-Anglo American boys as his best friends while the girl had five classmates as her close friends, three of whom are Anglo-American girls, one Croatian girl, and one Hispanic girl.

Both the children used Indonesian as their first language while their parents spoke Sasak as their first language and Indonesian as the second language. The language spoken at home was Indonesian but their parents often codeswitched between Indonesian and Sasak. Although the girl, not the boy, understood Sasak she never initiated a conversation in Sasak. The children mostly spoke Indonesian to each other with a significant increase in using codeswitching after living in the USA for almost two years. The same pattern was observed when they spoke to their parents. However, their parents mostly returned to speaking in Indonesian. When they got this kind of return or response they sometimes continued speaking in English or switching to Indonesian. The boy expressed his reluctance to be recorded in Indonesian as if he

suggested that he began to lose some aspects of his first language competence. In terms of first language competence, the girl was quite competent in her first language while the boy was not.

Data were collected using interviews and natural conversations. The children were interviewed by an Indonesian adult whom they were familiar with, and by others whom they were not familiar with. These interviews were videotaped. The conversations between the children, and those between the children and their mother were also videotaped. The topics of the interviews and the conversations were about school, close friends, carnival, and travel. The data collection was divided into two phases, namely, phase one that took place after they had lived for seven months in the States, and phase two that occurred a year later. This data collection was designed in such a way to see whether or not the subjects experienced language attrition after seven months of living in the English speaking environment. It was also intended to see whether or not there were differences of compensatory strategies employed by both subjects in phase one and phase two.

The data were analyzed descriptively in the sense that the description was done by identifying the compensatory strategies employed by the subjects, and by comparing the strategies used during phase one and phase two. The strategies were identified by observing what strategies appeared in the data of each subject, how many of them were used by each of them, and whether or not first language attrition had already begun at this stage. The comparison of the use of the compensatory strategies by each subject in phase one and phase two was intended to observe whether the pattern of compensatory strategies within a subject and between the subjects were different or not. The analysis was based on the compensatory strategies proposed by Turian and Alternberg (1991) which include interlingual strategies, intralingual strategies, and discourse strategies. Codeswitching as one feature of the interlingual strategies was elicited by asking the subjects whether they understood the first language equivalence of the sentence being codeswitched. If the subjects knew the Indonesian equivalence of the sentences being codeswitched they were considered to be codeswitching. The same procedures applied to codemixing in which if the subjects knew the Indonesian equivalence of the words or phrases being mixed, it was considered that the subjects did not use codemixing as a strategy to cope with their inability to say something in their first language. Thus, it suggested that the subjects did not suffer first language attrition.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In phase one, subject one (the boy) indicates that he employs codeswitching, codemixing and syntactic transfer as his strategies when interact with others.

Codeswitching and Codemixing

The writer acknowledges, however, that codeswitching and codemixing are compensatory strategies only if the users use them to overcome his or her first language deficiencies. Subject one codeswitches to English 19% (12 out of 62 utterances) when speaking to his mother and his sister. Apart from the possibility that he codeswitches to English because the utterances are more accessible to him, he codeswitches to emphasize the meaning, and to add emotive meaning to the utterances, such as in the following data. Bold is English otherwise Indonesian.

(1) **Okay…. okay** *adik …mau nonton Botmaster*. Okay okay I want to see
      ..   **Okay…okay .. I …. want watch *Botmaster*. This movie** ……

The subject codeswitches from Indonesian to English to emphasize his intention to watch the cartoon *Botmaster*.

(2) **Wow, it's cool**!. **Sis**… *lihat ini* **color job and** *tadi adik buat itu*
      orange color.

This exclamation is used for emphasis not as a compensatory strategy because the subject knows the Indonesian equivalence of the utterance "wow, it's cool!" In relation to codemixing, the subject uses it to fill lexical gaps. After asking him the Indonesian equivalent words for the codemixed words "color job", and "orange color", it is apparent that the subject does not know the Indonesian equivalent of the codemixed "color job". His not knowing the word is due to the fact that he never learned the word "color job". Then the subject uses codemixing as his strategy to overcome his first language deficiency.

Syntactic Transfer

(3)   *Muridnya …Ms Cannici ke ..kita … adik* **class.**
       Terus pergi kita ke… kita **class.**

The constructions in "adik class" and "kita class" are clearly English ones in which the head noun follows the pronoun that modifies it. In Indonesian the reverse is true. Thus, the subject applies a syntactic construction that is based on the English syntactic construction to his first language.

During phase one, subject two (the girl) uses a lot of codeswitching and codemixing in her interaction with her mother and her brother, as shown in the following data.

Codeswitching and Codemixing

Subject two codeswitches to English 23 % (14 out of 62 utterances) when speaking to her mother and her brother. The subject shows that she codeswitches in order to emphasize the meaning, such as in (4) below:

(4)   *Adik, … hati hati dong*. **You… you gonna mess my picture too**.
(5)   *Tu kan?..... rusak jadinya…..* **I told you** …..

Subject two also codemixes very frequently in the data and she codemixes the words or phrases which she still knows the Indonesian equivalence. Thus, the subject does not use codemixing as her strategy to overcome her first language deficiencies due to the fact that she still understands the Indonesian equivalences of the words or phrases being codemixed, such as:

(6) *Kakak udah bilang. Adik sih nggak* …**careful** …… **messy** *jadinya*.
(7)   **Clean** *sendiri sekarang…. kakak mau..* **take a rest** …..**tired.**

Thus, at this phase subject two has not shown the sign of first language attrition.

In summary, at this stage the subjects do not codeswitch as compensatory strategies. Subject one uses code mixing as his strategy to overcome his first language deficiencies. In addition, he uses syntactic transfer as a compensatory strategy. From this, it can be inferred that in this phase after seven months of residence in the second language environment, subject one has shown a sign of first language attrition which subject two has not.

In phase two, subject one employs a variety of strategies, such as codeswitching, codemixing, lexical borrowing, overt comments, appeal for assistance, and avoidance.

Codeswitching and Codemixing

In this phase, subject one codeswitches to English 13% (17 out of 130 utterances). Codeswitching is used to quote someone's expression, and to add emotive meaning to the utterances. The following examples illustrate them.

(8) *Dia* **ask again "where are you from?"**. **I said** "Indonesia". *Dia lupa aja* **my country**… **he always forgot my country.**

Here the subject codeswitches by quoting someone's expression "where are you from", and his replies "I said Indonesia." In the following expressions the subject codeswitches to add the emotive meaning:

(9) *Oh lihat itu*….**underwater boat**… **underwater…they … we can see under water and I like…. I like that**.
(10) *Ayah… ayah..* **it's so scared from up here.**

The subject codemixes some words very frequently when speaking to the interviewer. The pattern of use is very similar to the ones in phase one. He apparently shows that more mixed words are forgotten Indonesian words and many of them are those that he never learned in Indonesian but learned them in English. The words he forgot are game and rules, (data 11), and the words he never learned are cheese and square (data 12).

(11) *Adik sama Sis (sister) main* **game** *tapi Sis suka nggak mau pakai* **rules.**
(12) *Sis …enak ndak* **cheese***nya adik minta yang* **square** *..aja.*

Lexical Borrowings

In this phase subject one indicates his borrowing of lexical item from second language with phonologically adapted it to the first language system (Indonesian), such as in data 13 below.

(13) *Adik ndak bisa bahasa Indonesia , bahasa Amerika aja.*

Here the subject adapts the word Amerika (to mean English) into America with nonplosive /k/, the Indonesian phonological system.

Overt Comments

Subject one expresses his first linguistic deficiencies quite frequently during this second phase. He expresses the following utterances:

(14) **I forgot …… we see .. in the zoo** *tapi saya lupa* … **who guys?** (looking around for help). **but I forgot… elephants something**.

In this case his second language is more accessible to names of animal than his first language since he does not mention any Indonesian word for animal. Instead, he uses the word *elephants* for the Indonesian *gajah*. He indeed asks for help from people around when he said "who guys?", and looks around but no help is granted. The following data (data 15) illustrates that the subject shows his failure to remember the word *trompet* (the Indonesian word for trumpet) although he is able to pronounce the first syllable of the Indonesian word.

(15) *Ya…. Terus…* **I forgot** … trom…. Trom (with his finger playing a trumpet) **yes… then**…

Appeal for Assistance

There are several occasions when the subject appeals for assistance in the data, such as in the data below.

(16) *kemerdekaan?…….   apa sih itu? ……saya ndak tahu*
(17) *merindukan?……apa itu?…… perayaan? ……apa itu?*

The subject addresses these questions to the interviewer because he never heard the word *kemerdekaan, merindukan*, and *perayaan*. After the interviewer paraphrases them, he is finally able to understand them. Thus, this appeal for assistance is a strategy used by the subject to compensate his not knowing the meaning of the words in his first language.

Avoidance

There are several occasions in which subject one avoids the use of his first language as follows.

(18) *Adik ndak bisa bahasa Indonesia, ... bahasa Amerika aja.*

Here the subject either indicates that he feels better being interviewed in English or is tired of speaking in Indonesian. For the same reason, he also uses the same strategy of avoiding when he is going to be interviewed in Indonesian as below.

(19) *Adik… saya... ndak bisa bahasa Indonesia.*

Furthermore, the subject complains to his father by saying:

(20) *Ayah ini ndak tahu kalau adik ndak bisa.*

The subject complains to his father about his being asked to speak in Indonesian. Thus, the subject uses a complaint as a way to show that he is more convenient to be interviewed in English than in Indonesian.

In phase two, subject two (the girl) employs codeswitching, codemixing, syntactic transfer and overt comment as her compensatory strategies during this phase.

Codeswitching and Codemixing

Subject two codeswitches to English 3% (3 out of 87 utterances when speaking to the interviewer. She uses codeswitching for emphasis in the following data.

(21) *Tadi kakak pelajaran* **telling stories. I love that…. dumb the teacher. It's awesome, you know.**

She codeswitches to English to emphasize that she likes the lesson in her school very much. At this stage she also codemixes some words because she forgot the Indonesian equivalences of the words, such as in the data below.

(22) *Waktu kita ke* San Diego, *kita ke* **Sea world** *dan disana ada …* **whale** *lalu* ….**whale** *itu* ….**dance**. **Wow** ….*waktu dia* **dance** *itu, dia* **splash**. *Kita kena air.*

She forgot the Indonesian equivalences of the words whale, dance, and splash so she codemixes them. This is clearly different from codemixing she used during phase one when she still remembered the Indonesian equivalence of the mixed words. Thus, in this phase she uses codemixing as her strategy to compensate for her first language deficiencies.

Syntactic Transfer

Subject two applies second language (English) syntactic construction to her first language system, such as in the following data.

(23) *Adik punya* **chickenpox** *waktu kita ke mana itu… Fresno.*

The subject seems to transfer the English syntactic construction " he has chickenpox" when being interviewed. This syntactic construction sounds odd in her first language system because the word" punya" (have) is not used for diseases but for possession of something, like "Saya punya buku." Thus, this syntactic construction is transferred from English syntactic construction.

Overt Comments

Subject two expresses her first linguistic deficiencies during phase two. She expresses the following data.

(24) *Di* Disneyland *itu….. banyak yang lucu….itu yang punya pi… terus* **wear** *anu…. Itu apa namanya itu?* (to mean "*seragam*" or uniform)

The subject expresses her failure to remember the Indonesian word for uniform worn by the clown. She tries to seek help by addressing a question to the interviewer and making nonverbal explanations but fails to retrieve the word in her first language. At the same time she seems not to know the word in the second language too. Thus, she uses overt comment by saying "*apa namanya…. lupa*" as her compensatory strategy.

In summary, both subjects indicate their inabilities to express some of the intended meanings in their first language. They employ compensatory strategies to overcome their lack of linguistic repertoire in their first language system. A significant different pattern emerges during phase two for intrasubject and intersubject. Subject one indicates a higher degree of first language attrition by the use of more compensatory strategies, such as

codeswitching, codemixing, lexical borrowing, overt comments, appeal for assistance and avoidance compared to codemixing, and syntactic transfer he used in phase one. Subject two, on the other hand, who has not shown a sign of difficulties in her first language during phase one, she now indicates that she encounters some difficulties in her first language by using compensatory strategies, such as codeswitching, codemixing, syntactic transfer and overt comments.

Put it another way, after twenty two months of residence in the second language environment both subjects' first language has been affected with a different degree of effects. Subject one who is younger, and not fully competent in his first language is affected earlier while subject two who is more competent in her first language is affected much later, quite a long time after residing in the second language environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper begins with a general question: What strategies are used by first language attrited children to compensate their lack of repertoire in their first language? This paper found out that the children use interlingual strategies as well as discourse strategies to overcome their first language deficiencies. The interlingual strategies used are codemixing, lexical borrowing, and syntactic transfer while the discourse strategies include overt comments, appeal for assistance, and avoidance.

Based on the discussion above, some findings are also drawn. First, after residing in the second language environment, to a certain extent the subjects experience first language attrition.

Second, the children use interlingual strategies as well as discourse strategies to overcome their first language deficiencies. The interlingual strategies used are codemixing, lexical borrowing, and syntactic transfer while the discourse strategies include overt comments, appeal for assistance, and avoidance.

Other findings related to more specific questions are as follows. Firstly, during phase one the younger child who is not fully competent in his first language upon his arrival in the second language environment (the States) relies more on codemixing, and syntactic transfer as his compensatory strategies. In phase two, he uses a wider range of compensatory strategies, such as codemixing, lexical borrowing, overt comments, appeal for assistance, and

avoidance. It is speculated that during phase one he still retains most of his first language competence. As time elapses, he indicates that he lost some aspects of his first language competence as suggested by his use of wider range of compensatory strategies. Secondly, the older child who is fully competent in her first language upon her arrival in the second language environment does not show her sign of language attrition in phase one. After almost two years of residing in the new environment she shows that she begins to loss some aspects of her first language competence as indicated by her use of compensatory strategies, such as codemixing, syntactic transfer, and avoidance. Thirdly, it is speculated that first language competence plays a role on the degree of first language attrition in children. However, it is acknowledged that factors, such as patterns of language use at home, degree of contact with second language speakers, and time elapsed since residing in the second language environment contribute to first language attrition. As of Levy and Anderson's finding concerning forgetfulness that reflects active inhibition of native language words that distract learners when speaking the new language, the writer would argue that Levy and Anderson's subjects are adults who have already reached the critical threshold so they could retain lexical items longer while the subjects in this study are learners whose first language competence is not well developed yet so that as Hansen, in De Bot and Hulsen (2002: 261), put it "young children acquire language quickly but lose it in a short time".

Finally, language attrition is a common phenomenon that affects anyone who is in the process of acquiring another language. Language teachers, researchers and parents as well should be aware that bilingual children often rely on compensatory strategies to overcome their first or second language deficiencies. Thus, one should take into consideration this fact when analyzing students' performance or in designing classroom activities.

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