The Development of new Personalities in Learning Portuguese as L3

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Summary

This ethnographic study aims to analyze the possible constructed personalities of Language School students of a public university in Bucaramanga who are learning Portuguese as a third language. Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to gather the information needed. From them, we concluded that students do not develop or create a new full personality but as they have more exposure and contact with the language, they decide to adopt certain features associated with Brazilian culture. Since this was a small-scale investigation due to the low number of students who are learning Portuguese as L3, further research should focus on studying larger samples and longer-duration observations to try to identify the Big Five personality traits.

Key words: Cultural Accommodation, L3, Big Five personality traits, personality, Identity, Motivation.

El Desarrollo de Nuevas Personalidades en el Aprendizaje del Portugués como Tercera Lengua

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Resumen

Este estudio etnográfico tiene como objetivo analizar la posible construcción de personalidades en estudiantes que aprenden portugués como tercera lengua y que pertenecen a la Escuela de Idiomas de una universidad pública en Bucaramanga. En esta investigación, usamos entrevistas semi-estructuradas y observaciones como herramientas de recolección de datos. A partir de ello, pudimos concluir que los estudiantes no desarrollan o crean una nueva

personalidad completa, sino que, a medida que tienen más exposición y contacto con la lengua, ellos deciden adoptar ciertas características asociadas con la cultura brasileña. Dado que se trata de una investigación a pequeña escala debido al bajo número de estudiantes que aprenden portugués como tercera lengua, en futuras investigaciones se deberán estudiar muestras más amplias y realizar observaciones de mayor duración para identificar todos los cincos grandes rasgos de la personalidad.

Palabras claves: Adaptación Cultural, Tercera Lengua, los Cinco Grandes Rasgos de Personalidad, Identidad, Motivación.

O Desenvolvimento de novas Personalidades na Aprendizagem do Português como Terceira língua

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Resumo

Este estudo etnográfico tem como objetivo analisar a possível construção de personalidades em estudantes que aprendem Potuguês como terceira língua e que pertencem à Escola de Línguas de uma universidade pública em Bucaramanga. Nesta pesquisa, nós usamos entrevistas semi-estruturadas e observações como ferramentas de coleção de datas. Daí, pudemos concluir que os estudantes não desenvolvem ou criam uma personalidade totalmente nova, más sim, como têm mais exposição e contato com a língua, decidem adotar certas características associadas à cultura brasileira. Devido a que este é um estudo em pequena escala por causa do baixo número de estudantes que aprendem português como terceira língua, a pesquisa futura deve se concentrar em amostras maiores e observações a longo prazo para identificar todos os cinco crandes traços da personalidade.

Palavras-chaves: Alojamento Cultural, Terceira Língua, os Cinco Grandes Traços da Personalidade, Personalidade, Identidade, Motivação.

1. Introduction

Constantly, individuals who are learning a foreign language are exposed not only to different linguistic aspects, but also to other variables that come with the learning process such as culture, communicative manners, and stereotypes. Those factors can be reshaped depending on the person you are speaking with, or where the cultural interchange takes place. Having said that, is it possible that when an individual is learning a third language, they also start developing a new personality? Based on the experiences that we have had as students of a Foreign Language Teaching program, we realized there are subtle alterations in personality when our partners and us interact in Portuguese classes. In that way, we got interested in knowing how this phenomenon occurs and what aspects influence the possible construction of new personalities during and after the process of learning a third language, specifically from a group of ELT undergraduate students from a public university in Bucaramanga. Along these lines, we consider this study relevant as a way for people to become more conscious of the possible causes of the variations their personalities may present when they are exposed to one or more different speech communities.

Moreover, the main theories we identified to support our research were the Five Personality Traits and the Cultural Accommodation Hypothesis which state factors that are involved in the development of certain behaviors. These grand theories led us to the research question: what aspects influence the construction of new personalities when learning Portuguese as L3?

In the following sections, we provide a contextualization of related research, a theoretical framework and the methodology we used. In addition, we described the setting of our research, the findings, and the analysis and discussion of the data gathered. The final sections of the paper are the conclusions and the references of the study.

2. Related Research

2.1 Literature Review

Due to the cultural exposure to which bilinguals are immersed, some of their personality traits can be altered either subtly or in a more evident way. Hence, what we want to research is if this phenomenon also occurs in trilinguals or people who are learning an L3.

This literature review is divided into the analysis of two categories; the Personality and Other Variables category which addresses two subcategories: The Big Five personality traits and aspects like Gender, Motivation, and Identity treated as subdivisions. Moreover, the Cultural Accommodation category is formed by sources that can support the idea of how individuals can adapt themselves in terms of cultural manners or behaviors. After an extensive analysis concerning previous research, we realized that not much research about L3 personality has been carried out.

1. Personality and Other Variables

1.1 Personality Traits.

Throughout history, humanistic approaches have defined what personality means, for instance, psychologist Bermúdez (2012, p.3) states that “personality is a hypothetical construct, inferred from the observation of the behavior, not being an identity in itself”. In addition, studies related to the idea of constructing new personalities in foreign languages, have taken into account the Big Five traits. Previous research highlights that each personality trait varies concerning the language and the environment where the individual is, Ożańska-Ponikwia (2012, p. 217) concluded that “personality traits such as Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness, bring about self-perceived changes within behavior or else the body language when the individual is using a foreign language”.

1.2 Gender, motivation, and identity.

1.2.1 Gender

For years, researchers have investigated if gender influences emotional expression. Ożańska-Ponikwia (2017) demonstrated that personality traits, as well as the EI trait of Empathy, could affect the expression of feelings with a non-native language. However, there were no remarkable gender differences in self-perceived emotional expression in the second language. For that reason, gender is not the most influential aspect, but in some specific contexts it can stand out more than in others.

1.2.2 Motivation

Motivation and personality are significant factors of the individual differences that influence second language learning and which may work as predictors of learning success (Ghapanchi et al., 2011). Some studies have been carried out to show the link between the 'Big Five' framework and academic motivation. Results showed that intrinsic motivation was meaningfully connected to Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness traits. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation was also related to Extroversion and Neuroticism (Kaufman et al., 2008, as it was cited in Ghapanchi et al., 2011). Motivation has been seen as a key in order to achieve second language proficiency, since it "provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain language and often tedious learning process" Dörnyei (2005, p. 65).

1.2.3 Identity

This section has highlighted the importance of comprehending the link that language and identification share, since people that is able to have a strong relationship with both heritage and destination country are more capable to intertwine their ethnic identification with the national one, and do better in different quotidian aspects, like family relationships,

academic matters, and psychological stability (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013, as it was cited in Graziela N. et.al, 2019, p. 368). In addition to that, it is imperative to consider the acquisition of a new identity as a social process, since the individuals assume the roles that are assigned or that they can choose for themselves in different social dynamics and according to a specific situation (Carazzai, M, 2016, p. 7). The development of language identity in learners is a continuous process and is conditioned by the teacher-student and student-student relationships of power that are presented inside the classroom, and the background context where each individual comes from and that makes the language understanding different for the whole lot. (Gómez J., 2012, p. 62).

2. Cultural Accommodation Hypothesis

"When learning a second language, individuals might be subconsciously influenced by the culture of that language" (Yang et al., 1980, as it was cited in Harzing et al., 2010, p. 121). Hence, Chen et al. (2010) affirm that the process leads the behavior to affect the expression of their own personality. However, that process does not prevent individuals from maintaining their customs and behaviors in a foreign environment, on the contrary, that adaptation process enriches their personalities. Along these lines, we notice that individuals do have a process in which their personalities acknowledge the cultural values in the language they are speaking.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

To approach our study two grand theories were considered that helped us to fulfill our research objective, they are the Cultural Accommodation Hypothesis and the Big Five Personality Traits. What links these two theories is their relationship with personality that can

be defined as “a hypothetical construct, inferred from the observation of the behavior, not being an identity itself even the personality is something different and own of each individual” (Bermúdez, 1985, p.23). Considering this concept, now we can define the first theory, according to Chen et al. (2010, p. 2) “language activates bilinguals’ perception of differences in cultural norms, which then guide their behavior and affect the expression of their personality” which is one of the aspects we want to observe.

Additionally, The Big Five personality traits is “the method of how the ordered and dynamic set of characteristics that an individual possesses, impacts their cognition, motivation, and behavior, from that, emerges the five personalities which are; Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness” (as cited in Noorizwan, S. et al, 2016. Ryckman, 2014, p. 243). We also considered three aspects that affect, in some way, personality and language learning: gender, motivation, and identity. Gender is defined as “a group of people in a society who share particular qualities or ways of behaving which that society associates with being male, female, or another identity”. Motivation is the “willingness to do something, or something that causes such willingness”. Finally, identity is “the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc”. All these concepts helped to support our study and also allowed us to design the methodology and data collections tools.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research method

In this qualitative research we wanted to investigate the behaviors of students enrolled in Portuguese as a foreign language course, as a way to explore the possible constructed personalities. We opted to conduct an ethnographic study as it provided us with suitable

instruments for collecting the data we needed such as observations triangulated with interviews with students and the Portuguese teacher. Moreover, our sampling was selected based on two types of sampling strategies. For the observations, we applied a purposive sampling process, since we needed to find a specific population that shared the same features. For the semi-structured interviews, the procedure was volunteer sampling since we wanted the members of those courses to choose to be part of the research by their own decision.

3.2 Participants and data collections instruments

The participant sample was 10 students from the course Lengua extranjera II: Portugués básico II and 9 students from Lengua extranjera V: Portugués Intermedio I, aged between 18 and 21. For the semi-structured interviews, we only selected 2 students from each course, one woman and one man. Furthermore, we interviewed the teacher in charge to include a different perspective. Regarding the data collection process, we made two class observations that took 1 hour each one. Then, we designed two different five-question interview formats, one for the students and the other one for the teacher.

3.3 Data analysis

In order to gather the data, first we made the class observations considering a grid designed with the aim of confirming whether the five categories, mentioned in the literature review, took place in a real interaction. Furthermore, we conducted the interviews and recorded them to look for details and also to transcript them. Having all of this done, we classified all the answers of the five interviews according to the question in separated memos. In those memos, we analyzed the answers and made correlations between them in order to extract codes that represented the main topic of each memo. Finally, we took the relevant

parts of the findings that were related to the codes and we analyzed them making comparisons between the two levels of Portuguese.

3.4 Reflexivity

As we are students of the same process of learning Portuguese as a third language, we could expect certain reactions or answers through the interviews and observations. Hence, as we already have our own experiences and trayectory, we might infer that the participants' experiences shared similarities with ours and that could represent a bias for the analysis of this research.

3.5 Relevance and ethics

This research is relevant as a way for students who are learning a third language to become more conscious of the variations their personalities may present when they are exposed to different speech communities. Concerning the research ethics, we designed two consent forms, for the observations we typed a letter for the teacher to have the permission for making the class observations. The second format was related to the detailed information and implications about the participation in the interviews. In addition, all the information we gathered was used in this study respecting the participants' privacy.

4. Context description

The Language School of a public university in Colombia, which offers two different bachelor's degrees related to languages and literature, gives the students the opportunity to enroll Portuguese, English, or French as a foreign language subject. To take these courses, students are not required to have a previous knowledge of the language since the curriculum

is designed to approach five levels that go from Lengua Extranjera I (Basic, A1) to Lengua Extranjera V (Intermediate, B1).

In 2017, the syllabi for the Language School programs were reconstructed and it became mandatory to take a foreign language course as a subject. Regarding that improvement, the faculty is composed of native and foreign assistants and professors due to the different agreements of the university with other colleges around the world that leads students to apply for exchanges abroad.

6. Findings

6.1 Progression and Self-confidence

Participants showed low levels of self-confidence when speaking in Portuguese at the beginning of the course because of the lack of linguistic resources. Participant 1 stated that his language abilities in the L3 were not advanced enough to be fluent. This situation changed once participants were more exposed to the language. Participant 4 expressed that over time his confidence increased and started enjoying speaking in Portuguese. What makes them feel motivated to learn is the manner in which the class is managed. Participant 2 feels more desire to learn because the class is dynamic, which also occurs with Participant 3 who considers the musical element in class as her main motivation.

6.2 Feelings and Experience

According to the findings, participants tended to have strong feelings when speaking Portuguese. Participants 2 and 5 associated freedom, a sense of belonging and peace with the L3. On the other hand, Participant 1 related the changes in personality to the experience and the fluency that he can acquire. Participant 3 constructs his personality around imitation and

tries to sound native-like on the L3. Participant 0 also agrees with the fact that students feel more comfortable and free when they have more experience with the language.

6.3 Personality in Brazilian culture

Findings indicate that the perception of persona inside Brazilian culture is influenced by the fact of following certain cultural and regional models. Participants 1, 3 and 4 affirmed to imitate the Carioca accent which is endorsed by participant 0 who has noticed a trend of imitation in class. That linguistic imitation is perceived as unawareness for participant 2 since she deems that there is a strong preference for the language and imitation is seen as something natural. However, participant 3 perceives those imitations as aware as learning the language.

6.4 Identity as Spanish speaker

For some participants different aspects of language may influence their identities as Spanish speakers. Participant 1 declared that what he learns just stays in the class. On the contrary, Participant 2 mentioned that in her free time she listens to music and reads in Portuguese. Additionally, Participant 4 took “axé” as his new life philosophy. Participant 3 mentioned that she has in mind linguistic and cultural aspects, but she disagrees with stereotypes. About that, Participant 0 stated she teaches cultural aspects to derogate generalized beliefs.

6.5 Motivation

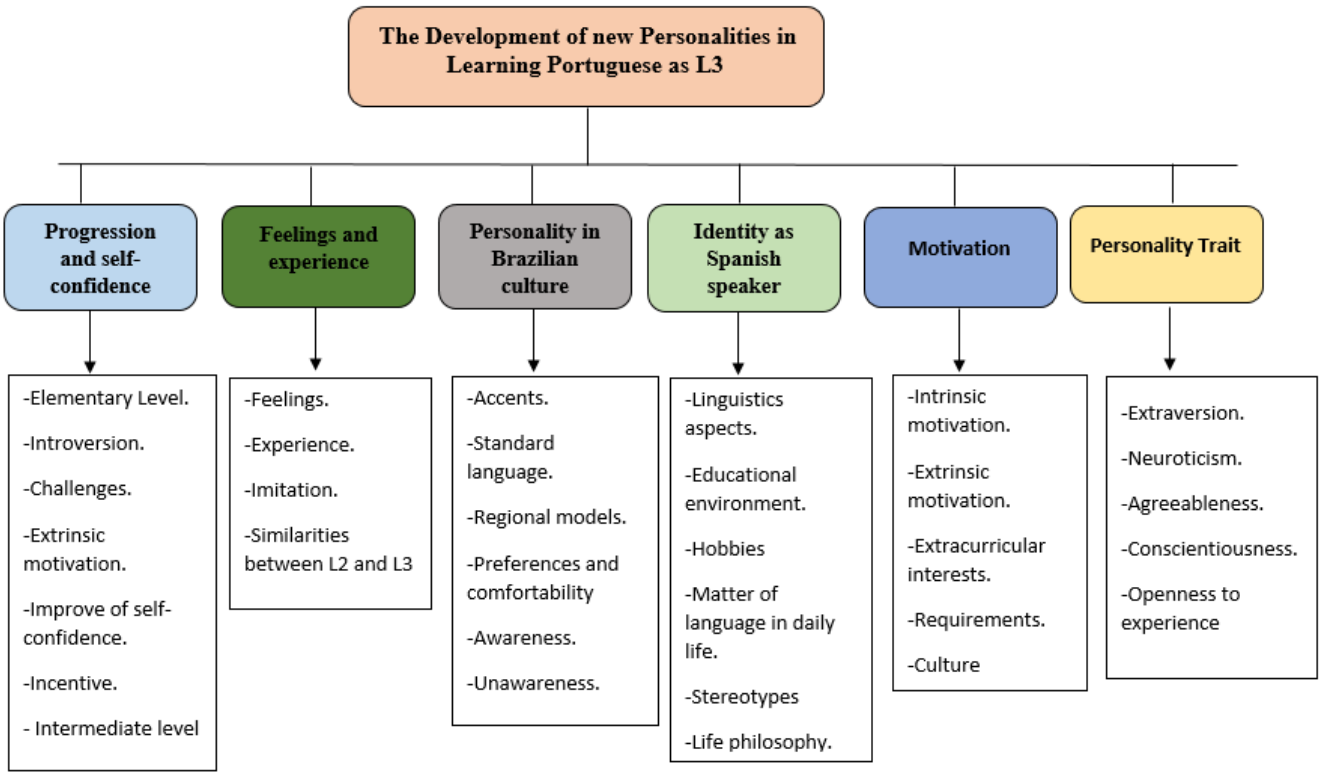
Some participants started learning Portuguese because they had to. Participants 3 and 4 indicated that they chose it because it was a mandatory subject. However, later they found

their own interests that motivated them to continue learning, for instance: Participant 3 is interested in Brazilian music and literature, and Participant 1 finds art and food interesting. On the other hand, Participants 2 and 4 showed their curiosity for Brazilian culture. Regarding that, Participant 0 indicated that she prefers to create an atmosphere around culture and not explain grammar in isolation and in that way motivate students more.

6.6 Personality traits

Most of the Big Five personality traits were perceived. About Neuroticism, it was evidenced that the classroom environment influences the mood of the students. Furthermore, students interacted between them and tended to be extroverted. In the same way, they were interested and open to the activities and cultural content proposed by the teacher. They also felt safe to express their emotions and ideas due to the pleasant classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, neither high nor low levels of Consciousness were perceived. Perhaps the activities do not reflect this process since they did not require much planning.

Graphic 1.



7. Analysis and discussion

Regarding the data we collected through this extensive study to identify the aspects that influence the construction of a new personality when learning an L3, we found that non-predominant changes are presented on participants. However, the more exposed to the language and the culture they are, the more development of personality traits and the acquisition of a foreign culture can be noticeable. This gathered information allows us to evidence the presence of the Extraversion trait in their learning process and their performance. Also, it shows its relation with extrinsic motivation as mentioned in the literature review (Kaufman et al., 2008, as it was cited in Ghapanchi et al., 2011). Hence, the more motivated they feel by the teacher and her class, the less introverted they are. This data showed the different extrinsic and intrinsic motivations participants have to learn Portuguese (ibid). Although it started as an obligation, now they have found aspects that have caught their attention and that have led them to a deeper exploration of the culture and language.

One of the subcategories of our study was gender and if it was a crucial aspect when expressing emotions, about that, Ożańska-Ponikwia (2017) demonstrated that personality traits, as well as the EI trait of Empathy, could affect the expression of feelings with a non-native language. However, there were no remarkable gender differences in self-perceived emotional expression in the second language. Although at the beginning we expected to notice gender differences, the findings of our research support the notion of the low influence of gender in the construction of a personality in the L3 since we did not find any difference between male and female participants.

Additionally, in the Identity as Spanish speakers category we found that participants have different perceptions about Brazilian culture, for instance when they imitate foreign

accents or implement new life philosophies. That allows us to evidence the Cultural Accommodation Hypothesis since learning a new language deals with the process of internalizing new behaviors and different ways of expressing one's own personality. However, this process does not prevent individuals from maintaining their customs and behaviors in a foreign environment, on the contrary, that adaptation process enriches their personalities (Chen et al., 2010).

Our small-scale research contributes to the field of Language Acquisition to create, develop or improve learning strategies for bilingual people who are interested in learning a third language. It provides individuals with information that can solve questions about the experience they are going through. Also it is relevant for people to become more aware of the possible variations their personalities may present when they are exposed to one or more different cultures.

8. Conclusions

In this ethnographic research focused on identifying the aspects that influence the construction of a new personality when learning an L3 at a public university, we could conclude that not all the participants present remarkable traits that lead us to think there is a full construction of a third personality, otherwise, there are just subtle changes in their behaviors, cognitions, and emotional patterns that emerged after long exposure to Portuguese classes. In second-level students, changes were almost non-existent, but fifth-level students affirmed to have internalized or acquired certain customs typical of Brazilian culture.

This research provides us with an initial idea about the whole process students undergo when they start learning an L3, the problems and challenges that may arise and their main motivations to continue learning. It also helps to visualize this situation that could

contribute to the reinforcement of strategies for teaching a third language, especially for the students of the Language School.

Some drawbacks were identified throughout this research, for instance we should make longer-duration observations to try to find traits that perhaps we could not find. The sample was too small to identify specific patterns of behaviors and indeed we could not make generalizations with the few results that we gathered. In that sense, for further research the study should be focused on the Big Five personality traits and how the students display them, even a sizable sample would be needed in order to represent all the people who learn Portuguese as a third language in a public university.

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