

REVIEW OF FACTORS AFFECTING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is a review of the extent socio-psychological factors can affect second language learning. Socio-psychological factors, like motivations, attitude and stereotyping and neurological factors play an important role in the process of learning a second or foreign language. However, scholarly views differ on how much effect these factors have on second language learning. This paper illustrates the different views towards these socio-psychological factors and their neurological correlations.*

KEYWORDS: second/foreign language learning, motivation, attitude, stereotyping, socio-psychological factors, neurological factors.

English can be difficult when taught in a foreign language (FL) setting, where authentic language input may not be readily available outside the classroom. Often, with a character-based language, language learners' motivation must be high since persistence and determination are needed to deal with the stress of a difficult language.

“Motivation represents one of the most appealing, yet complex variables used to explain individual differences in language learning” (MacIntyre et al. 2001, p. 462). These words accurately describe the complexity of the concept that researchers, classroom instructors and language learners themselves have faced since Gardner and Lambert brought to light the various aspects of motivation through their studies in the late 1950's. In the following literature review of the studies conducted on motivation, the authors will attempt to present a limited overview of motivation, supporting research from both inside and outside of the classroom.

Motivation has been broadly recognised by scholars, researchers, and teachers as one of the major variables that determine the level and success of second language learning (SLA). As emphasised by Dornyei (2001), “teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness” (P. 116). Motivated learners are enthusiastic, eager to work hard, concentrate on the tasks given, do not require constant encouragement, willingly confront challenges, and could even motivate others, facilitating collaborative learning. The early attempt to understand the impact of motivation on English language learning stems from the field of social psychology (Gu, 2009). This research paper analyses the impact of motivation on English language learning in terms of the various motivational theories.

The motivation of learners greatly affects their willingness to take part in the process of learning. Numerous studies have reported the importance of viewing the concept of motivation as a multifaceted phenomenon. Oxford and Shearin (1994) have examined a number of motivational theories and six variables that influence motivation in language learning (Al-Bustan & Al-Bustan, 2009, S454):

- Attitudes (i.e. sentiments towards the target language).
- Beliefs about self (i.e. expectations about one's attitudes to succeed, self-efficiency, and anxiety).
- Goals (perceived clarity and relevance of learning goals as reasons for learning).
- Involvement (i.e. extent to which the learner actively and consciously participates in the learning process).
- Environmental support (i.e. extent of teacher and peer support).
- Personnel attributes (i.e. aptitude, and language learning experience).

As argued by Pit Corder, “given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data” (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009, 1). This statement was given four decades ago and, from then on, numerous theoretical perspectives and studies investigating the multifaceted nature of motivation and its impact on second language learning have emerged. At the same time, the world has also witnessed the growth of globalisation, European reconstruction, the demise of communism, extensive economic and political migration, greater mobility, and the rapid development of media technologies—all contributing to the relentless pace of global English (McKay, 2002). In other words, over the recent decades the world has transformed dramatically—it is currently distinguished by sociocultural and linguistic flexibility and diversity, where language learning, identity, and ethnicity have become multifaceted contemporary subject matters and the focus of considerable attention in the field of sociolinguistic.

However, it is only recently that those engaged in the field of second language learning motivation have actually started to investigate what this evolving global phenomena may suggest for how scholars conceptualise the motivation to acquire proficiently in global English as second language for individuals wanting to gain global recognition or identity (Shafaei & Nejati, 2008). In other words, motivation in second language learning is presently in the process of being completely reevaluated and reconstructed within the perspective of current concepts of self and identity.

Establishing a successful second language learning process is a challenging undertaking that is subject to numerous external and internal aspects in the societies where it is brought in. Motivation towards acquiring proficiency in English as well as the attitudes of teachers and learners are among the major aspects in the success of bringing in a foreign language in any institution. The attitude and levels of motivation towards English as a second language are modest; not hindering English language learning but also not creating the most excellent environment for English language learning in educational institutions (Klemens, 2009). Educators facilitating English language learning should identify the weaknesses in attitude and motivation among learners then deal with them by developing suitable strategies of English instruction which are motivating and can foster favourable attitudes towards learning English as second language.

In the last few years, a great deal of work has been done in the border areas between linguistics and other disciplines relevant to language learning such as sociology, psychology and neurology. In these areas, the main aim for most researchers is to find solutions to the problem of language learning. From a realistic perspective they argue that there is not in theory any limit to the degree of proficiency that may be achieved in a second language, and that, consequently, the traditional distinction between native and non-native in language is a doubtful validity

(Christophersen 1973, pp. 10-28). In fact socio-psychological factors, like motivation, stereotype, attitudes towards the target language community etc...are very important in learning a second language. For some psycholinguists like Macnamara factors such as attitude are not so important, while others like Gardner and Lambert insist on the importance of attitude and motivation in learning a second language. Therefore in this paper we shall try to illustrate the two different views towards these socio-psychological factors and their neurological correlations.

Motivation is one of the most important factors which has a great influence on language learning. According to Brown (1980), "Motivation is an inner drive impulse, emotion or desire that moves one to a particular action; motivation is a task-oriented." Learning a foreign language clearly requires motivations. One of the best-known studies of motivation in second language learning was carried out by Robert Gardner and Wallace (1972). Over a period of twelve years they extensively studied foreign language learners in Canada, several parts of the United States and the Philippines in an effort to determine the effect of attitudinal and motivational factors. Two different clusters of attitudes divided two basic types of motivation: instrumental and integrative motivation.

Instrumental motivation refers to motivation that requires learning a language as a means for attaining instrumental goals, furthering a career, reading technical materials, translation and so forth. Integrative motivation is found in students who admire and want to identify with the people whose language they are studying. It is employed when a learner wishes to integrate himself within the culture of the second Language group, to identify himself with and become a part of that society. The results of Lambert's studies show that integrative motivation generally accompanied higher scores in proficiency tests in a foreign language. The conclusion from his studies was that integrative motivation may indeed be an important requirement for successful language learning, and students who possess an integrated type of motivation tend to do better in oral skills than students whose motivation is instrumental (Diller , K , 1981 , pp, 1157-164).

The point about motivation is that it makes people persist. It is a massive learning job to acquire the skills which are necessary in order to function adequately in communicative situations using a second language. It is the perseverance that is essential. People do not have to like language learning (although this helps), and they do not have to like the nation whose language they are learning , although this helps too : but as long as economic or social circumstances requires successful language learning , determined people will learn and that is very essential.

Closely associated with motivation is attitude. According to Brown, attitude is defined as follows:

“ attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition, affect in human beings , develop early in childhood and are the result of parents ‘ peers attitudes, contact with people who are different in any number of ways, and interacting affective factors in the human experience. These attitudes form a part of one's perception of self, of others and of the culture in which one is living.” (Brown, D., 1980) p.113

As we mentioned above, there are many theories, some for and others against the idea of the importance of socio-psychological variables and second language proficiency. For example, Oller found that generally only a very weak relationship existed between socio-psychological variables and second language proficiency. He came to this conclusion after many studies and

empirical research involving Chinese-speaking graduate students living in the United States of America. He found that integrative motivation was not a good predictor of success in second-language acquisition among this group of students. That students desire to stay permanently in the U.S.A was negatively correlated with attained skills in English. Conversely other researchers, like Gardner et al. (1976) found positive correlation between motivational factors and the achievements in French of English Canadians.

In fact, it is impossible to generalize from the above evidence and state that motivation always correlates with achievement proficiency. This is clear from Oller's research on the Chinese students where the circumstance were very different. My explanation from that case is that as long as the Chinese students knew that they were to reside permanently in the U.S.A they were afraid of losing their Chinese identity and so insisted on using their native language when communicating among themselves. This fear caused them subconsciously to reject the learning of English since, as we explained, they subconsciously felt that by using English as a second language, they would lose their Chinese language and with it their Chinese identity.

On the other hand, if an individual has the integrative motivation to be part of a foreign society which, in turn, can help improve his status in that society, providing him with a job, friends and a good position, all these factors can motivate him to be part of that new society, which in its turn, will help him achieve highly in the foreign language.

From our own experience as teachers of English as a second/foreign language, the role of motivation is more important and effective than attitude. Some people may have negative attitudes towards the language, but that does not mean that they will not achieve well in that language. Our example for this is a personal one reflecting the circumstances in which we live. Most of the Arab people living in the territory occupied by Israel are very good and fluent in Hebrew although they have a negative attitude towards Hebrew and the political system in Israel. But the fact that we cannot deny is that language is a means of communication. In comparing first language acquisition with that of a second language, we find that a child acquires his first language to fulfil his needs to discover the environment around him and, to communicate; the same is true for a second language. The Arab people in Israel are learning the Hebrew language motivated by their desire to communicate with the Israeli people and government in order to deal with administrative papers or find jobs: they need to use the language in their daily life in order to deal with a cashier in a supermarket, to speak with a policeman and provide for so many human needs to survive and achieve their goals. These needs motivated the Palestinians to learn Hebrew and speak it fluently. This is not only true of the young. We find this phenomenon also among the elderly who need to know what is going on in Israel, want to hear the news from the country's own resources, watch T.V and be aware of everyday happenings in Israel. The situation in Israel, therefore, is an example of how a negative attitude does not affect achievements in second language learning. Thus, the necessity to fulfill human needs is more powerful than attitude. Macnamara (1972 P.36) provides as another example the case of the Irish for England and the English language, yet in Ireland English has for the most part replaced Irish.

Another point worth making is that we find that some people, in spite of acquiring and achieving well in a second language, never lose their own accent. This is because either they are afraid of losing their identity or they want others to recognize their origin of which they are proud. Other people try hard to succeed in not showing their own accent, so that they speak the second language fluently with the society that uses this second language. It is a fact that language reveals much about the speaker's status, even to non-linguistically trained listeners

and for that reason, we find that, for example, in an Arab country people learn French to show that they are aristocratic or upper class. Some people try always to speak a language other than their mother tongue such as English to show that they are educated. This attitude towards a second language and way of thinking that it can enhance status motivates students to learn the second language fluently. It is the same with immigrants who want to get ahead in society. They place a high value on speaking the majority's language and, therefore, are highly motivated to learn the dominant tongue as a second language (Rene Appel and Pieter Muysken, 1987, P. 33).

Another motivational factor is stereotype. It is another important factor that can profoundly affect the learning of a second language. According to Brown, "A stereotype is a category that singles out an individual as sharing assumed characteristic on the basis of his group membership." In fact, stereotype may be accurate when depicting the typical member of a culture, but in describing a particular person it is inaccurate, because each person is a unique individual whose behavior cannot be predicted on the basis of his cultural norms. Brown claims that stereotyping usually implies some type of attitude towards the culture or language in question and this stereotype can affect the second language learning (Brown, D, 1980, P. 125). An Example is the stereotype about learning French or German in English schools. Boys have a stereotype for German as a tough language – " the men's language " – which encourages boys more than girls to achieve well in German, while, on the other hand, they have a stereotype for French as an elegant and delicate language and the language of romance. Thus French women's, rather than a men's, language is associated with this stereotype. Girls with the same stereotype for French naturally do very well in that language as elegant and romantic are typical descriptions of women. Therefore, generally English boys do well in German while the girls do better in French.

It cannot be denied that language is related to culture, but this doesn't mean that learning a second language necessarily involves adopting the culture and lifestyle of the community in which that language is the dominant medium of interaction. We agree with Appel and Muysken (1987, pp. 109-110) that " If this were the case proficient bilinguals should be more or less schizophrenic, forced to live with two possibly conflicting systems of norms and values " which, in our opinion, is a most improbable occurrence. We do not have to identify with the culture of the target community to achieve well in learning a second language, although it is a very great help. On the other hand, there are many cases that prove that instrumental motivation can lead to positive achievement in second language learning, which shows that as long as we are dealing with human behavior nothing is absolute and generalization cannot take place because every individual is unique. Whatever one's attitude towards the target community, although it may help in learning the second language, our needs are stronger than our attitudes. Our needs motivate us to reach our goals, but we cannot ignore other psychological factors like personality traits, inhabitants and self-esteem (which differ from one person to another) in the learning of a second language.

It is a fact that he who learns a second language after puberty may speak it fluently, but with an accent. This is because his vocal organs have lost their elasticity and have been adapted to his mother tongue. It is, therefore, not easy for him/her to speak the second language without an accent.

Another fact to be considered is that children born clean as it were, like a blank sheet of paper, uninfluenced by socio-psychological factors, and do not have any attitudes towards any language. However, once grown older they become aware of such factors as attitude and

stereotypes from their parents, peers and the society in which they live. This helps them to learn any language in the world besides their mother tongue. They can master this second language and speak it without an accent because their vocal organs are still flexible. Another factor claimed by Lennenberg is that the localization of language in the brain takes place until the age of puberty. That is, therefore, identified as the critical period after which learning a second language will be difficult. This critical period is connected with the leterization of the brain, the specialization of functions of different hemispheres of the brain. As mentioned above, according to Lennenberg, leterization is finished about the time of puberty. After that period learning a second language will be more difficult than at an earlier age.

Penfield (1939) claims that if a toddler is exposed to several languages instead of only one , he not only forms speech centers in the dominant hemisphere of his brain , which is normally the left , but also commits parts of his right cortex to the faculty of speech. As a consequence, when he becomes an adult he will find it easier to acquire new languages than the individual who received a monolingual education and, therefore, has speech represented on one side of his brain only.

Early bilingualism enlarges the cortical areas devoted to language. It would appear that linguistic systems may be stored differently in the brain or be sub served by different cerebral circuits (Lebrun 1976 P. 181). By studying the bilingual brain, researchers have proved that the left hemisphere of the brain may be considered dominant for language functions in most individuals and that the left hemisphere is the one with centers for speech perception, and speech production, writing and audition.

In view of the latest neurolinguistics and psycholinguistic research, there is a good reason to believe that cerebral organization of language is not identical in monolingual and bilingual speakers and that the right hemisphere might be involved in learning the rules that govern the system of a language such as intonational contours (Kurt Kraetschmer, 1986, p. 39).

In a study that investigated right hemisphere participation in a second language acquisition, Opler (1981) focused on experimental evidence for differential lateralization of the languages of bilingual speakers. He conducted experiments to measure lateralization from which he concluded that at least for some bilinguals there is differential lateralization for the two languages at least during some stages of second language learning.

Galloway and Krashen, in their study of cerebral organization in bilingualism and second language learning, claim increased right hemisphere participation, especially during the early stages of second language learning. In this study they examined the "stage hypothesis" which propounded that the right hemisphere may be more involved during the initial stages of adult second language performance than during later stages. Galloway and Krashen (1980) proposed a modification of the "stage hypothesis" on the basis of a distinction between unconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning. They formulated the "modified stage hypothesis" which suggested that the right hemisphere may be more involved during the initial stages of language acquisition, whereas the left hemisphere may contribute to conscious language learning. Second language acquisition is a subconscious, explicit process, similar to child language acquisition.

This distinction makes it possible for them to question Lennenberg's claim (1967) that lateralization is complete by puberty and that it constitutes the neurological basis for the critical period for language acquisition. According to Krashen and Galloway (see Krashen. K

.1986) the development of cerebral dominance may be complete even before puberty and has little or nothing to do with "critical period." Thus the ability to acquire language naturally does not disappear at puberty. After reviewing reports on brain damaged individuals, Krashen and Galloway proposed to redefine the "hypothesis stage" by specifying that the right hemisphere plays a role not in language learning but in language acquisition.

There is a claim by Hakuta, K. (1986) that a bilingual has two personae, one for each language. The evidence for this claim comes from three levels of investigation:

- 1) - The neurological level
- 2) - The information processing
- 3) - The education psychology level (Hakuta, K, 1986, p 85)

The neurological level looks at the physiology of the brain and asks whether the languages are differently localized in the brain. In fact, research projects and studies have provided evidence that different aspects of language are stored in different locations in the brain (Ibid. pp. 87-9). Hakuta 1986 said that the most compelling evidence for the organizational characteristics of the two languages might be found in data showing that certain areas of a brain are associated with particular languages. Much has been learned about the functional localization of speech through the study of monolingual individuals who have suffered injuries to certain parts of the brain (Mostly through strokes and traumatic injury). Over 90% of cases of aphasia, for example, result from injury to the left hemisphere. Specific parts of the left hemisphere have also been identified with different aspects of language such as grammar and meaning if different aspects of language are stored in different locations in the brain, Might not a bilingual who suffers damage at a given location experience different kind of loss of the two languages? Observation recovery patterns in bilingual aphasiacs reveals that in about half of the cases different languages recover at the same rate (Paradis .1977 and Albert, M., & Obler, L. 1978). In some more eccentric cases the two languages fluctuate in their recovery patterns.

No one can deny that there is a strong correlation between language learning and neurological and the cognitive factor. Kessler and Quinn (1980) investigated the cognitive consequences of bilingualism in a study of problem solving abilities. They found that the bilinguals are superior in problem solving over monolinguals. their justification for this result is that the bilinguals ' superiority in tasks requiring cognitive flexibility is probably due to the fact that they are confronted with the two systems of linguistics rules. They will probably develop a more analytical view of language and must, therefore, have greater awareness of language than monolinguals (Appel .1986.pp. 109- 110). Sapir hypothesizes that the language an individual speaks determines his world view. In learning two languages, the bilingual interrelates two systems "Shared meaning." Language is considered to be the guide and the program for the mental activities of individuals and the interpretation of the surrounding world to be channeled via linguistic categories (Hornby. 1977 P .152).

In general, the results of all studies on socio-psychological factors show that there is a strong relationship between second/foreign language learning and factors like motivation, attitude, and stereotyping. These factors are recognized by scholars, researchers, and teachers as one of the major variables that determine the level and success of foreign/second language learning. This paper has also demonstrated that each language has its different place in the brain.

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