

SOCIAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract.

In this article the information is given about some basic factors which affect second language learning process. The article also clarifies all the given factors how to affect on L2 learning procedure.

Аннотация.

В этой статье дается информация о некоторых основных факторах, влияющих на процесс изучения второго языка. В статье также разъясняется, как все указанные факторы влияют на процесс обучения L2.

Key words: L1, L2, culture, social factors, motivation, stereotypes, personality.

Ключевые слова: L1, L2, культура, социальные факторы, мотивация, стереотипы, личность.

Introduction

There are some factors that are presumed to affect second language learning. The first factor is related to the effects of personality traits that are linked to second language learning, such as: self-efficiency, willingness, extraversion, and introversion, etc. The second factor pertains to motivation and second language learning. The third one is stereotyping and its effects on second language learning. The fourth is about social distance as a sociocultural factor of second language learning. And the fifth factor is about attitude. The study looks for how much effects do the factors mentioned so far have got in second language learning.

Motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, and personality are considered as factors that greatly influence someone in the process of his or her second language acquisition. Experts state that those factors give a more dominant contribution in SLA to learners variedly, depend on who the learners are, their age, how they behave toward the language, their cognitive ability, and also the way they learn. Some factors are said to be dominant and some others are being equal but each of them gives different contribution for the success or the failure of second language acquisition. It is believed that every normal child, given a normal upbringing, are successful in the acquisition of their first language. However,

experience shows that some of them success variedly in acquiring their second language due to the factors influencing the process of second language acquisition.

Those factors: motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, learning style, and personality influence the way learners encounter language learning and may hinder or support them in their efforts to master L2. Moreover, these elements seem to be an essential part of the learning process, which can contribute to the success or failure of a second language learner lay an important role in the acquisition process. The psychological preparation, which requires a positive attitude toward the second language, is a basic requirement for success in second language acquisition.

The learners' positive attitude encourages learners to make serious endeavors to acquire the language. On the contrary, negative attitudes detain learning. Learners' various perceptions about their teachers, the target culture, and the curriculum, shape the type of the attitude toward language learning. Competence of a second language is reached when there is an ability to be in continuous contact with the second language. This continual contact depends on the learner's attitude toward the second community.

There are many factors affecting SLA, which are inter-connected, interacting and inter-promoting. Fortunately, in recent years, many educators and linguists, home and abroad, have done many researches and have put forward many constructive suggestions. As a foreign language educator, he or she should know better about the individual differences and teach learners according to their aptitude. Language teachers should facilitate a second language learning with the help of multimedia, internet platform, mobile communication devices, ...everything available. As learners, they'd better put factors affecting SLA, individual and social, in perspective, and take the advantage of them to succeed in Second language acquisition.

Similarly, one of the most relevant problems that was detected, as expressed by the students, is the lack of bases they have from school and high school regarding English instruction. They actually consider this the biggest issue they have to deal with in this moment. It seems illogical, this is a population that should have received English lessons for eleven entire years or more in case of technical high schools, but still they do not seem to have a great amount of knowledge in this area.

Language and Culture

An interpretation of the relationship between culture and language is essential for language learners; educators, and all those interested in language learning. The perception of different opinions concerning the relationship between culture and language is important for language teachers and learners as it clarifies the various conceptions toward language use. Additionally, these perceptions also help to know how language and culture affect the acquisition of a second language. There are many publications that focus on the aspects of culture in second language teaching. The most

important periodical that is recently published is that of Byram which contains a set of essays conducted by innovative researchers in the field of language acquisition and culture, defining culture as common principles, beliefs, and behaviors of a community, and calling for the adoption of an intercultural approach to language teaching in the European schools.

Hall discusses, from a sociocultural perspective, the theoretical support of current trends on the nature of language and culture learning, and the meticulous elucidation of Lange and Paige discusses multidisciplinary perceptions on culture teaching and learning, combining culture into the second language curriculums. The relationship between thought, language and culture was described in the 19th century by two German philosophers: Johann Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, and later, it was described by the American anthropologists: Franz Boas, Edward

Sapir, and Sapir's student Benjamin Lee Whorf. Johann Herder presents the equation (one language = one folk = one nation) to express that nations' languages are reflected by the way its people think. The following lines explain his beliefs about language, thought, and culture. (If it be true that we learn to think through words, then language is what defines and delineates the whole of human knowledge in everyday life, it is clear that to think is almost nothing else but to speak. Every nation speaks according to the way it thinks and thinks according to the way it speaks.) Wilhelm von Humboldt uses the following lines to describe the relationship between language and culture. (there resides in every language a characteristic world-view By the same act whereby spins language out of himself, hespins himself into it, and every language draws about the person that possesses it a circle whence it is possible to exit only by stepping over at once into the circle of another one.) The best perception of the relationship between language, thought and culture is seen in linguistic relativity which is formed by Sapir and Whorf. A hypothesis states that people perceive the world from different perspectives and according to the structure of their language.

Language and culture are interlocked fields that mutually affect each other. According to Gleason (1961), languages are products and symbols of culture. Culture as a deep-rooted set of actions and forms of perceptions is crucial in the acquisition of a second language. Languages and culture are complicatedly interconnected so that one cannot break up the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. The acquisition of a second language is also the acquisition of a second culture except when learning the language for some instrumental reasons.

Social distance

Social distance is the cognitive and affective closeness of two cultures that come into contact within an individual. It contains the following parameters: dominance, integration, congruence, permanence.

Dominance: the idea that the target language is dominant/superior to the other. If L2 is dominant, learning will be difficult, if L2 is non dominant learning will be easier.

Integration: the degree of socialization with the target culture.

Congruence: refer to the similarity between the two cultures, if they are similar, the learning will be easier.

Permanence: refer to the period that a learner could stay in the target culture, the longer he could stay, the easier he could learn the new language. The greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty to learn its language, and conversely, the smaller the social distance, the better will be the learning situation. (Brown, 2000)

Motivation and Attitude

Motivation is concerned with what makes people move to make a choice. Attitude is the power that gears the move/motivation toward the choice. There is a general fact that success depends on motivation, and that good language learners are highly motivated. (Ushioda, 2009). In 1968, a paper was presented at the TESOL convention by Gardener, an associate professor of psychology at the university of Western Ontario. The paper, which has a big impact on many studies conducted on motivation and second language acquisition, presents four important findings about motivation and second language acquisition:

1) Motivation is important in the second language acquisition.

2) Truly successful learners are motivated to become integrated in the target language community.

3) The learners' integrative motivation comes from the attitudinal characteristics in the home (active and passive role).

4) Second language acquisition involves taking on behavioral patterns of the target community . In 1972, Gardener and Wallace Lambert conduct systematic attempts to see the impact of attitude on second language acquisition. They define motivation as a construction made up of particular attitudes and identified two types of motivations:

Integrative and instrumental. The integrative motivation (in which learners take on positive attitudes toward the target community) refers to learners who wish to integrate in the target community and in social interaction. The second type, instrumental motivation, refers to learners who wish to acquire the language for technical reasons. Negative attitude toward the second language community is always associated with decrease in motivation to acquire the second language, and accordingly to unsuccessful competent in the second language. (Brown, 2000). Learners' motivation involves three components: a sociocultural component, involves cultural and personal experiences, an educational component, involves the educational milieu,

and an internal component, and involves beliefs and perceptions. Each of these components has its own effect on motivated behaviors; behaviors that demonstrate motivation. For example, the positive attitude toward a target community (sociocultural component) enhances acquisition (motivated behavior) of the language of the target community.

Motivation is one of the most important factors in second language acquisition. Richards believes motivation as a factor that determines a person's desire to do something. It is obvious that learners who want to learn are likely to achieve more than those who do not. The role of attitudes and motivation in SLA has been investigated by Gardner and Lambert, who define motivation in terms of 'the learner's overall goal or orientation', and attitude as 'the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal'. They distinguish two types of motivation:

a) Integrative motivation: a learner studies a language because he is interested in the people and culture of the target language or in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it.

b) Instrumental motivation: a learner's goals for learning the second language are functional and useful, for example they need the language to get a better job, to pass tests, to enable him to read foreign news paper, etc. It has been stated that learners can be influenced by both types of motivation. However, there are situations when one can be more effective than the other. Integrative motivation plays a major role where L2 is learned as a 'foreign language', while an instrumental motivation is more important where L2 functions as a 'second language'.

Gardner links an integrative motivation to 'additive bilingualism' which means that learners add a second language to their skills with no harm to their mother tongue. Instrumental motivation is more likely to be linked to 'subtractive bilingualism', where the learners tend to replace the mother tongue by the target language. Motivation can be also distinguished into intrinsic and extrinsic. "Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination". Extrinsically motivated behaviors expect a reward, for example money, a praise or positive feedback.

Based on the results of this study, the attitude of the second language learner toward the second language appears to be the most factors that affect second language acquisition. There is a strong relationship between learners' attitude toward the second language and success in second language acquisition. Attitude is a series of values that several factors described in this paper influence second language acquisition variedly. It has to be said that individual differences are important factors in SLA.

Those factors: motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, learning style, and personality influence the way learners encounter language learning and may hinder or support them in their efforts to master L2. Moreover, these elements seem to be an essential part of the learning process, which can contribute to the success or failure of a second language learner. The psychological preparation, which requires a positive attitude toward the second language, is a basic requirement for success in second language acquisition.

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