HELLENIC REPUBLIC
National and Kapodistrian
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Applied Linguistics to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Unit 7: Focus on Learning and the Language Learner

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The "Good Language Learner" (1/3)

- Are there personal characteristics that make one learner more successful than another?

- In your experience, as an English learner, which characteristics seem to you most likely to be associated with success in L2 acquisition?

- Then share your opinion with your group members. Find three most important and three least important learner characteristics.

The "Good Language Learner" (2/3)

- Is a willing and accurate guesser.

- Tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking.

- Is willing to make mistakes.

- Constantly looks for patterns in the language.

- Practices as often as possible.

- Analyses his or her own speech and the speech of others.

The "Good Language Learner" (3/3)

- Attends to whether his or her performance meets the standards he or she has learned.

- Enjoys grammar exercises.

- Begins learning in childhood.

- Has an above-average IQ.

- Has good academic skills.

- Has a good self-image and lots of confidence.

Issues to be discussed in this unit

- Variables affecting language learning:

  - **Affective variables**: Motivation and Attitudes.

  - **Personality variables**: Introversion/extroversion, tolerance of ambiguity, inhibition/risk taking.

  - **Cognitive variables**: learning styles, intelligence, learning strategies.

- Learner autonomy.

Language learning variables

Affective

Relate to emotions and feelings.

e.g. motivation and attitudes.

Personality

Relate to personality traits.

e.g. Introversion/ extroversion, risk taking, tolerance of ambiguity.

Cognitive

Relate to the mental makeup of the person.

e.g. learning styles, intelligence, learning strategies.

Affective variables

Motivation (1/3)

Motivation is commonly thought of as an inner drive, an impulse of a desire that moves a person to a particular action.

Motivation (2/3)

Integrative motivation: when someone learns a language because they desire to learn more about its culture, its people and language, i.e. they wish to integrate with the target language culture and become part of that culture.

Instrumental motivation: learning a second language in order to achieve some other instrumental goal: furthering a career, reading technical materials, translating, passing an exam, etc.

(Gardner & Lambert, 1972)

Motivation (3/3)

Intrinsic motivation: when we engage in an activity for no apparent reward but for the sake of the activity itself because it raises our self esteem and makes us feel better.

Extrinsic motivation: when we engage in an activity in anticipation for some reward from the outside and beyond ourself (money, prizes, grades, positive feedback).

(Gardner & Lambert, 1972)

Motivation: Research findings

- Both **integrative** and **instrumental** types of motivation are related to success in L2 learning. Most L2 learning situations involve a mixture of each type of motivation.

- Research strongly favours **intrinsic motivation**, especially for long-term retention. Intrinsically motivated learners are striving for excellence, autonomy, and self-actualization.

Motivating students in the classroom

- The **content** needs to be **relevant to their age and level of ability**, and the learning **goals** need to be **challenging yet manageable and clear**.

- **Varying** the activities, tasks, and materials to increase students' interest levels.

- Using **cooperative** rather than competitive goals to increase students' **self-confidence**.

- **Cultural and age differences** will determine the most appropriate way for teachers to motivate students.

Attitudes (1/3)

Attitudes towards the target language people (reference group):

Positive attitudes will make language learning more enjoyable and effective. If you dislike the reference group you may resist learning their language.

Attitudes (2/3)

Attitudes towards your country:

Ethnocentricity: a belief in the superiority of your own country.

If you are ethnocentric you believe that other people should learn your language and not you theirs.

Attitudes (3/3)

Anomie:

Feeling a lack of attachment to your own country. Many individuals yearn to be a part of another country and to be living somewhere else. If that somewhere else happens to speak the language you are learning, you will be strongly motivated to learn the language.

(Remember Schumman's Acculturation Theory?)

The chicken and egg situation

- Do positive attitudes and motivation produce successful learning or does successful learning engender positive attitudes and motivation?

Personality variables

Personality characteristics

There are a number of personality characteristics that may affect L2 learning, such as:

- Extroversion vs. introversion,

- Inhibition vs. risk-taking,

- Tolerance of ambiguity.

Introversion/extroversion

Extroverts

Are sociable person, do not like studying by themselves, like the company of other people. They always have a ready answer and like change. Extroverts find difficulty concentrating, are easily distracted from study but like taking part in conversations and seek to expose themselves to input and do not fear producing output.

Introverts

Are quiet, fond of books rather than people, reserved and distant. They tend to plan ahead, do not like change and do not like acting on impulse.

Inhibition vs. risk-taking

- It has been suggested that **inhibition discourages risk-taking**, which is necessary for progress in language learning.

- Inhibition is often considered to be a particular problem for **adolescents**, who are **more self-conscious** than younger learners.

- **Inhibition** is a **negative force**, at least for second language **pronunciation** performance.

- Inhibition may have more influence in **language performance** than in language learning.

Tolerance of ambiguity (1/2)

- Relates to your willingness to tolerate ideas and propositions that run counter to your own belief system or structure of knowledge.

- **Intolerance of ambiguity**: tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as sources of threat. Intolerant individuals are close minded, dogmatic and tend to reject ideas that do not fit into their cognitive organisation.

Tolerance of ambiguity (2/2)

- A language learner is confronted with many stimuli, many of which are ambiguous: persons with a low tolerance of ambiguity experience frustration and diminished performance. They make frequent appeals to authority.

What does research have to say?

- Personality variables seem to be a major factor **only** in the acquisition of **conversational skills**, **not** in the acquisition of **literacy or academic skills**.

Cognitive variables

Learning Styles

Learning style refers to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills (Reid, 1995).

Types of learning styles related to L2 learning

Perceptual learning styles:

- visual,
- aural/auditory,
- haptic (kinesthetic and tactile).

Cognitive learning styles:

- field-independent vs. field-dependent, (tendency to see the trees or the forest).

Field dependence and independence

Field-independence

- See things more **analytically**.

- Relates to the ability to perceive a particular item or factor in a field of distracting items.

Field-dependence

- See things more **holistically.**

- Tendency to be dependent on the total field so that parts embedded within the field are not easily perceived.

Research findings (1/2)

- **Field independence** is related to classroom language learning that involves analysis, attention to details, and mastering of exercise, drills, and other focused activities.

- **Field dependence** is related to the communicative aspects of language learning that require social outreach, empathy, perception of other people, and communicative skills.

Research findings (2/2)

- Field dependence and independence may also prove to be a valuable tool for **differentiating child and adult language acquisition** due to the fact that **field independence increases as a child matures to adulthood**.

Intelligence

- Traditionally, intelligence refers to the mental abilities that are measured by an IQ (intelligence quotient) test. It usually measures only two types of intelligence: **verbal/linguistic and mathematical/logical intelligence**.

- There are other types of intelligence such as spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence.

Multiple Intelligences (1/2)

- **Linguistic intelligence**: speaking, using words, writing, giving presentations, solving word problems.

- **Logical-mathematical intelligence**: using numbers, logic, calculations; learning and understanding grammar rules.

- **Spatial intelligence**: drawing, painting, using colour, art, graphics, pictures, maps, and charts.

- **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence**: muscular coordination, athletic skill, body language, drama and theatre.

Multiple Intelligences (2/2)

- **Musical intelligence**: using music, tones, hearing; producing the intonation and rhythm of a language.

- **Interpersonal intelligence**: talking with other people, understanding them, using language to communicate.

- **Intrapersonal intelligence**: self-knowledge, self-confidence, using language to analyse yourself.

<div align="right">(Gardner, 1993)</div>

Research Findings

- Intelligence, especially measured by **verbal IQ** tests, may be **a strong factor** when it comes to learning that involves **language analysis** and **rule learning**.

- On the other hand, intelligence may play **a less important role** in language learning that focuses more on **communication and interaction**.

- It is important to keep in mind that **"intelligence" is complex** and that a person has many kinds of abilities and strengths.

Learning strategies (1/2)

- **Learning strategies** are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning.

- They are **moment to moment techniques** that we employ **to solve problems** posed by **second language input and output**. Learning strategies relate to input (taking in messages) while communication strategies relate to output (how we deliver messages to others).

Learning strategies (2/2)

- Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

- Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence.

Direct and indirect strategies (1/2)

- Oxford (1990) defines strategies as specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed and more transferable to new situations.

- She makes the distinction between:

  – direct strategies which help the learner come to grips with the language itself and

  – indirect strategies deal with the regulation and management of learning.

Direct and indirect strategies (2/2)

- They refer to specific actions a learner uses in order to make sense of their learning and to respond to a particular problem.

- Learning strategies can be learnt.

Types of learning strategies

DIRECT STRATEGIES To work with the language itself	INDIRECT STRATEGIES To manage learning in general
Memory strategies They are used for remembering and retrieving new information.	**Metacognitive strategies** They are used for coordinating the learning process.
Cognitive strategies They are used for understanding and producing the language.	**Affective strategies** They are used for regulating emotions.
Compensation strategies They are employed when using the language despite knowledge gaps.	**Social strategies** They are employed when communicating and learning with others.

Remember

- All students use some strategies.

- Beginning students need learning strategies as much, if not more, than more advanced students.

- Teachers can teach learning strategies and learners can learn them.

Strategy training

- The aim of this training is to make learners more aware of the strategies they are using and to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate strategies.

- Indirectly: by embedding strategy instruction within tasks.

- Explicitly: using tasks which directly practice strategies.

Learner autonomy

- Or self directed learning, learner independence, life long learning.

- These interrelated terms refer to learner's ability to take greater control over their learning, become more active and more responsible for their learning. It refers to learner's ability to set their own objectives, to their ability to manage and organize their learning process, to seek opportunities to learn on their own.

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End of Unit

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