



ROLE OF AFFECTIVE FACTORS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Inst. Yasin Turan
Abdullah Gul University, Kayseri - TURKEY
School of Foreign Languages
yasin.turan@agu.edu.tr

Abstract

Success in learning a second or foreign language depends on many variables. Some of these variables are related to the external factors such as language learning environment, instructors, approaches, methods and techniques, curriculums, materials and time devoted for learning a foreign language. In addition to these external factors, there are some other internal (related to learners themselves) variables that have positive or negative impact on foreign language learning process. The most commonly inter-individual factors are described as Cognitive and Affective factors. As the studies go deeper into the language acquisition and foreign language learning process, affective factors become more and more important for both learners and educators. In this regard, this paper summarizes the literature about the role of affective factors in foreign language learning.

Keywords: Language learning, affective factors, affective filter, natural approach.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a process that involves various elements and it is effected by different factors. Knowing the fact that every individual is unique and learning is a process in which personal differences involve, it is inevitable for foreign language learners to have different experiences in terms of learning a foreign language. This also explains why some students learn a new language more quickly and successfully. However, individual differences and people's uniqueness aren't enough to explain why some learners are more successful than others. Although there have been different classifications that aim to explain the factors affecting foreign language learning, many linguistics and scientists classify these factors into two groups as internal and external factors (Madrid, 1995). External factors can be classified into two groups of environmental and curricular and they involve some variables such as native language, teachers, curriculum, course materials social context, etc. (Mahmoudi & Mahmoudi, 2015). Internal factors, on the other hand, refer to mainly cognitive and affective factors. Cognitive factors, as the name reveals, are about the process occurring inside the learners' minds. Although many people refer to both cognitivist and behaviourist approaches when it comes to learners' mental activities, cognitivist approach has a different point of view which involves memory, attention, sensation and encoding into learning process (Jordan, Carlite & Stack, 2008:36).

Cognitivist approach to language learning process has been explained by some scientists including John Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Benjamin Bloom, David Ausubel and Jerome Bruner. According to Piaget (1959), language acquisition process and cognitive development are interrelated and cognitive growth is one of the main determiners of the development of language forms. Piaget described cognitivism as learners' constructing meaning by using their own understanding and this process follows a path from simple to complex. This brings us to two cognitive construction processes which are organization and adaptation. Organization refers to learners' constructing meaning of things that make sense to them while adaptation refers to adding new information into learners' thinking system (Wijayanti, 2013). Since these processes are actively involved in first language acquisition, they also play a significant role in learning either a second or a foreign language.

Lev Vygotsky, on the other hand, emphasizes several roles of language. These roles are transferring abstract concepts, logical reasoning and establishing communication by making use of social

interaction. The latter is considered as the most important contributing factor of children's language development process. His theory underlines the importance of between language and thought. Although language and thought are different in origin, in some cases they may intersect with each other and especially during childhood they even integrate with each other (Vygotsky, 1962). Another important point that Vygotsky brought to language acquisition phenomenon was social role of language. The most important role of language is social communication. Therefore, a child's early and primary speech has a social function. When a child reaches a specific age, the speech continues having a social function with two different divisions. One of them is egocentric speech which is a transition process between phonetic speech to inner speech. The second one is communicative speech which is more interaction based and social. Vygotsky underlines the fact that social interaction role has a crucial role in determining language development. Vygotsky, like Piaget, believes that thought comes before language development. Vygotsky believed that the development of thought has a close relationship with the development of language (Dastpak, Behjat & Taghinezhad, 2017).

By taking theoretical background about cognitive process of language development into account, we can move towards to some specific cognitive factors that affect learning a second or foreign language. Ortega and Carter (2000) distinguishes the cognitive factors of second language learning as (1) age, (2) aptitude, (3) intelligence, (4) motivation and (5) learning style and (6) personality. Bond (2002), expands the list by stating the factors that may contribute to one's language learning process and emphasizes: (1) age, (2) exposure to foreign language in infancy, (3) immersion, (4) intelligence, (5) personality, (6) attitude and motivation, (7) relationship between first and target language, (8) sensory style, (9) learning strategies, and (10) other factors (mimicry, musical ability).

Apart from Ortega and Carter and Bond, there are some other researchers who mention different cognitive factors that involve in learning a second or foreign language process. Although there are slight differences in their naming of these factors, they all agree upon the fact that cognitive factors play a crucial role in explaining what is happening in learners' minds while learning a language and how these factors affect the process. As it is mentioned before, only cognitive factors are not enough to explain a complex process of language learning. In this regard, affective factors, which are the main focus of this study will be explained so that their roles in learning a foreign language can be emphasized.

AFFECTIVE FACTORS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Recent trends in applied linguistics highlighted the importance of the study of psychology in foreign language learning. Researches and studies in applied linguistics have put the lights on the close relationship between psychology and language learning process. As mentioned before, it is obvious that cognitive factors such as verbal intelligence, phonological processing ability, and long-term memory capacity strongly influence the student's ability to learn a second language (Rubin, 1975). However, there are some other significant factors that serve as a scaffolding for foreign language learning and these factors are far beyond cognition or capacity for conceptual understanding. Thanks to recent developments in applied linguistics and psychology, linguists became more and more enthusiastic to explain the complexity of foreign language learning process and they had enough motives to comprehend the role of affective factors in depth.

Although there are a lot of prominent linguistics that contribute to understanding of both first and second or foreign language learning process, Stephen Krashen put his stamp on the field of linguistics. He and Tracey D. Terrell published a book in 1983 and explained the details of Natural Approach as well as its implications in the classroom environment. As it is stated in the book, Natural Approach is not the only and the best approach that explains everything perfectly nor is it something new. It has many common features with older traditional approaches. On the other hand, it is a coherent approach and comprehensible to apply for different needs and practices (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Krashen's second language acquisition theory is based on five main hypotheses.

First hypothesis emphasizes the distinction between **acquisition and learning**. According to Krashen, there are two ways of developing language ability. Acquisition involves the subconscious acceptance of knowledge through the use of communication. This process is clearly seen while people are developing their native language skills. Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process of acceptance of knowledge about a target language. In order to develop competence in second language, acquisition should be given priority over learning and learners should be exposed to comprehensible input.

Second hypothesis is known as **natural order hypothesis** and according to Krashen (1982), the fact that acquisition of grammatical structures has a predictable order and some structures are preceded by others is one of the most important findings in recent years. In other words, learners tend to learn some language items earlier while they learn some others later. On the other hand, Krashen underlines that although there are significant similarities in terms of natural order of acquiring grammatical structures, individual differences should also be taken into consideration.

Monitor hypothesis underlines that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Normally, acquisition ignites our words and sentences in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. On the other hand, learning is responsible for only one function which is monitoring or editing. Monitor hypothesis suggests that consciously learning of formal rules have a limited role in second language performance and learners can apply these conscious rules only when three conditions are met. However, even if all these conditions are met, learners may not be able to successful in consciously grammar learning and using. These conditions are listed as following (Krashen, 1982).

- a) Time: A second language learner needs some time in order to think about rules and use them correctly. Since conversations are in a flow and it is hard to find time to think about what we will say next and which grammar structures will be used, focusing too much on conscious use of grammar structures may cause distracting pauses during oral performance.
- b) Focus on Form: Although time is an important variable in terms of monitoring, it is not enough. Learners of a second language should also pay attention to the forms and their correctness. Sometimes, learners may have enough time to plan their utterances but they may still not focus on how they form their sentences as a result of paying too much attention on content of their utterances.
- c) Know the Rule: This is a very challenging condition for most of the learners. Rules of a specific language are very complex and it is impossible for learners to be exposed to all the rules of a target language. Supposing that they are given all the rules of a language, even the best students will not learn every rule they are taught.

The fourth hypothesis which Krashen gives great importance among the others is **Input hypothesis**. This hypothesis emphasized the quality and comprehensibility of the input received by language learners. Abukhaddala (2013) explains the importance of input with following example. In order to teach a person how to drive, we must first show him or her how to do it (input) and when the driver is ready, he or she can start trying (production). Learning how the carburettor or the gear box works will not help him or her become a good driver. In other words, the more a learner is exposed to input, the more he will find himself or herself ready to produce. When it comes to language learning process, comprehensible input gains great importance. Krashen (1982) states that in order for learners to move from stage "i" to "i+1", they should be provided with comprehensible inputs that are +1 beyond their current level and learners should focus on the meaning instead of the form of the input. While Krashen explains his input hypothesis, he refers to a child's first language acquisition process. While acquiring the first language, children are provided with language inputs given by either their parents or caretakers and these inputs are not focused on teaching a language. It takes us to two different types of inputs which are "roughly-tuned" and "finely-tuned" inputs. Roughly-tuned input is preferred to finely-tuned inputs since they are more consistent with the natural process of language acquisition.



In everyday conversation, we normally use various types of grammar structures and we shape our utterances by taking our communicative needs into consideration. On the other hand, in the classroom environment, teachers use the language not only by simplifying but also by analysing the structures they use at a specific moment. This makes the given input "finely tuned", or in other words, input directed only at the students' level of acquisition. Roughly tuned input, on the other hand, may present some structures over the students' level of acquisition. Some of those structures may be slightly beyond the students' level of acquisition; however, that does not mean they cannot understand them. What makes providing learners with roughly tuned inputs advantageous is the fact that they are more natural and of high quality (Abukhaddala, 2013).

Krashen's fifth hypothesis emphasises the importance of affective factors in language learning and focuses on ***affective filters*** that have great influence on the success of second language acquisition. He has underlined that there are mainly 3 factors that can influence the second language acquisition.

Motivation

Researchers and educators agree on the fact that motivation plays a significant role in processes connected to learning since it requires personal involvement and commitment. Learning a second language is also a process that requires learners to be willing and enthusiastic to learn. Gardner (1985) also emphasizes the relationship between language learning and motivation by defining motivation as the combination of effort and desire to succeed the aim of learning a language. In order to be a successful language learner, each of these components should be involved in language learning process. Effortless desire or desire without effort may end up with failure in language learning. As one of the crucial factors that affect success in language learning process, motivation may derive from different sources for different learners. This leads us to two main sources of motivation: (1) Intrinsic Motivation, (2) Extrinsic Motivation.

Gardner (1985) defines intrinsic motivation as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity". As it is understood from its definition, intrinsically motivated learners feel the enjoyment of learning a second language without any external reinforcement or pressure. Although it may seem an advantage for both learners and teachers, it is necessary to design activities that will appeal learners so that they feel the joy of learning leading them to feel motivated intrinsically. Noels, Pelletier and Vallerand (2000) indicated that there are three types of intrinsic motivation. These are knowledge, accomplishment and stimulation. Although these factors contribute a lot to intrinsic motivation, they are independent from each other and individual differences may have influence on these variables. Knowledge is a source of motivation for doing an activity in order to feel the pleasure of exploring new ideas so that one's level of knowledge improves. Accomplishment, on the other hand, is mostly related to a person's feeling of readiness to get deeper information about a task or to succeed a goal. Stimulation, which is the last type of intrinsic motivation, is affected by performing a task since it is a source of aesthetic appreciation, fun and excitement. Stimulation, relates to motivation based simply on the sensations stimulated by performing the task, such as aesthetic appreciation or fun and excitement (Noels et al., 2000).

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to a desire to fulfil a purpose for reasons independent from learners such as rewards, appraisals, success in educational tasks or business life etc. In other words, extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity since it leads to some separate results. Behaviours that are performed in order to get some reward or to avoid from a punishment can be given as examples of extrinsically driven ones (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Extrinsic motivation gains importance especially in terms of classroom teaching and teachers should be able to make use of different tools that boost learners' motivation to learn a second language. Although both motivation types are important for a successful language learning process, most of the times, intrinsic motivation is rarely or not enough found in learners which makes extrinsic motivation more important for both learners and teachers.



Self-confidence

Self-confidence is one of the most important characteristics that most of successful people have in various fields. It is also very important for people who are learning a new language since using a language requires having productive skills such as speaking and writing. Learners with lower level of self-confidence tend to hesitate from performing such skills that causes them to refrain from practising the target language both in and outside the classroom. Although there are a few slight differences between self-confidence and self-esteem, some researchers have referred to self-esteem as having the same meaning and effect with self-confidence in language learning process. Rubio (2007) defines self-esteem as "a psychological and social phenomenon in which an individual evaluates his/her competence and own self according to some values, which may result in different emotional states, and which becomes developmentally stable but is still open to variation depending on personal circumstances". Self-confidence has both psychological and social dimensions. Learners who have low self-confidence will be faced with some psychological drawbacks such as anxiety, sense of insecurity and fear which will result in some negative effects on learning the target language (Rubio, 2007).

As one of the important factors that affect language learning process, self-confidence has positive or negative influence on other factors such as motivation and anxiety. Learners with high self-confidence level tend to have less anxiety since they feel themselves comfortable in performing a specific language skill. This increases their chance of success and creates a sense of accomplishment which also contributes to their motivation for learning a second language. Therefore, learners should be provided with learning environments in which their self-confidence is promoted. The classroom environments in which students can participate in specific tasks without any hesitation is very important. Learners should be able to show their performances without feeling the pressure of making mistakes and being corrected by their teacher or being humiliated by their classmates. Therefore, teachers should be careful while providing feedbacks, correcting students' mistakes and organizing language tasks that have positive impacts on learners' self-confidence (Tunçel, 2015).

Anxiety

Anxiety is another affective factor that most of the language learners feel while they are performing tasks related to second or foreign language learning. In order to understand the role of anxiety in language learning process, it is important to examine the term "anxiety" from a general point of view. Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson (1971) defines the term "anxiety" as a state of apprehension and fear resulting from predicting a threatening situation or event (as cited in Al-Khasawneh, 2016). Anxiety may affect different types of learning but when it is associated with leaning a second or foreign language it is defined as "second/foreign language anxiety". According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), language anxiety has a close relationship with factors such as learners' behaviours, beliefs, perceptions and feelings especially related to classroom learning. These factors may vary from one learner to another due to individual factors and uniqueness of the language learning process.

It is suggested that foreign language anxiety is independent from general classroom anxiety and should be seen as a situation-specific anxiety deriving from the uniqueness of the formal learning of a foreign language. According to Horwitz et al., the fact foreign language study implicate self-concept and self-expression makes foreign language anxiety different compared to other academic anxieties. On the other hand, it is probable that learners who have a general anxiety in other academic fields tend to experience foreign language anxiety as well while it is less probable for learners whose anxiety level is low in any academic field to experience a high level of anxiety in foreign language learning. This situation leads us to the idea that there are some deeper reasons for some learners that make them feel anxious while they are learning a foreign language (Tran, 2012).

In order to explain this situation, we need to make a distinction between learners who are anxious and learners who are not. This leads us to three approaches to the study of anxiety which are the trait, state and situation specific. However, there is a distinction between trait and state anxiety. MacIntyre (1995, cited in Spielberger, 1983) explains that state anxiety is an instant, short-term



emotional experience with instant cognitive influences. On the other hand, trait anxiety is a steady tendency to become anxious in a wide range of situations. Third type of anxiety is named situation specific anxiety, which is experienced by learners in a specific situation. Since different characteristics of a given situation can be examined, situation-based studies may provide more information to understand anxiety. The main difference is that learners are tested for their anxieties in limited circumstances such as taking a test, speaking in public, writing examinations, performing math or participating in a language class. Situation specific forms can be seen as trait anxiety measures limited to a given context (Bekleyen, 2004 cited in MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991b).

Foreign language anxiety is mostly related to performance evaluation in an academic or a social context. Therefore, there is a link between learners' performance-based evaluation and three related performance anxieties which are: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; and 3) fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is a type of nervousness caused by fear of engaging in a communication with people. People who have communication apprehension tend to experience difficulties in speaking in public and they hesitate to participate in an ongoing conversation. Therefore, it plays a very crucial role in foreign language anxiety. Learners who are introvert in nature and who have greater communication apprehension, regardless of their native language, likely to have problems in foreign language classes where they have less control of the communication and their performance is monitored by either their teachers or by their classmates (Horwitz et al.,1986)

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), test anxiety is an important topic in foreign language anxiety since in most of foreign language classes learners' performances are used as an important criterion as an assessment tool. This situation creates a pressure of making mistakes on learners. Students who feel test anxiety make themselves believe that unless they do well in a given test, they aren't successful learners. Due to various reasons, teachers use tests and quizzes quite often in language classes and this situation create anxiety on even successful students leading them to make mistakes while performing either oral or written tasks. Since some other factors such as shyness, being introvert and being monitored by both teachers and peers, oral performance-based tests tend to create more stress and anxiety on language learners.

Finally, negative evaluation is defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969). Fear of negative evaluation is different from test anxiety since it may also appear in any social or evaluative situations as well as in testing conditions. Aydın (2008) points out the existence of a significant correlation between language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation in his study. It is found out that there is a correlation between other people's thoughts and being called on in the classroom, communicating with both teachers and other students, fear of making mistakes and failing. Fear of leaving an unpleasant impression causes foreign language anxiety among students.

The sources of fear of negative evaluation include negative judgments by others, leaving unpleasant impressions on teachers or classmates, making verbal, spelling or pronunciation mistakes, and disapproval by others. These factors show us the fact that the fear of negative evaluation is a significant source of foreign language anxiety. In addition to these effects, fear of negative evaluation has potential to trigger the fear of being called on in class; test anxiety; communication apprehension with classmates, native speakers, and teachers; fear of making mistakes while performing speaking tasks; all of which may end up with feeling negative attitudes towards language learning (Aydın, 2008).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Learning a language is a process that is effected by different factors and it is necessary for both learners and educators to be aware of these factors so that they can manage the process more



effectively and successfully. While some of these factors such as learning environments, curriculums, teaching approaches and techniques and used materials are independent from learners and decided by educators and policy makers, there are some other factors which are directly related to learners and their cognitive and affective readiness for learning a foreign or second language. Although different scientists and linguistics classified affective factors slightly differently from each other, most of them emphasized some very important factors such as age, intelligence, learning styles and personalities. Although these factors are shown among some of the determiners of the success in learning a foreign or second language, they are not enough to explain why some learners are more successful than others or vice versa. Therefore, it is also necessity for learners and educators to take affective factors into consideration as well.

Teachers, especially, should be aware of the underlying reasons for some learners' failure while learning a second or foreign language. Creating a nonthreatening atmosphere, organizing tasks that are based on learners' performances instead of results or achievements, relying less on formal tests and diminishing all the factors that may cause learners feel anxiety while learning a second or foreign language must be priorities of language teachers. While organizing teaching activities by taking learners' affective factors, teachers should also consider each learners' uniqueness and cognitive capabilities. Therefore, language classes should provide various opportunities for learners so that they can benefit no matter what their cognitive and affective characteristics are.

WJEIS's Note: This article was presented at 9th International Congress on New Trends in Education - ICONTE, 10- 12 May, 2018, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 8 Number 3 of WJEIS 2018 by ICONTE Scientific Committee.

REFERENCES

- Abukhaddala, I. (2013). Krashen's five proposals on language learning: Are they valid in Libyan EFL classes: *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 6, No. 1, 128-131.
- Al-Khasawneh, F.M. (2016). Investigating foreign language learning anxiety: A case of Saudi undergraduate EFL learners: *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 12(1), 137-148.
- Aydın, S. (2008). An investigation on the language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among Turkish EFL learners: *Asian EFL Journal*, 30(1), 421-444.
- Bekleyen, N. (2004). Foreign language anxiety: *Çukurova Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Cilt 13, Sayı 2, 27-40.
- Bond, K. Profile of a successful language learner. (n.d.) Retrived March 29, 2018, from http://www.seasite.niu.edu/tagalog/teachers_page/language_learning_articles/profile_of_a_successful_language.htm
- Dastpak, M., Behjat, F., & Taghinezhad, A. (2017). A comparative study of Vygotsky's perspectives on child language development with nativism and behaviourism: *International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching*, Volume 5, Issue 2, 230-238.
- Deci, Edward L. & Ryan, Richard M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological wellbeing across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 49(1), pp. 14-23.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.



- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign-language classroom Anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Jordan, A., Carlite O., & Stack, A. 2008. *Approaches to Learning: A Guide for Teachers*. New York: The McGraw Hill Companies.
- Krashen, S.D. (1982). *Principles and practise in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press Inc.
- Krashen, S.D. & Terrell, T.D. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. London: Prentice Hall Europe.
- Madrid, D. (1995). Internal and external factors in language teaching. *Actas de las 1I Jornadas de Estudios Ingleses*. Universidad de Jaen, 2 (2), 59- 82.
- Mahmoudi, S.& Mahmoudi, A. (2015). Internal and external factors affecting learning English as a foreign language: *International journal of language and linguistics*. Vol. 3, No. 5, 2015, pp. 313-322. doi: 10.11648/j.ijll.20150305.16
- Noels, K. A., L. G. Pelletier, R. Clément, and R. J. Vallerand, "Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory," *Language Learning*, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 57-85, 2000.
- Ortega, V.L. & Carter, D.C. (2000). Individual differences, strategic performance and achievement in second language learners of Spanish: *Studia Linguistica*, 54: 280-287. doi:10.1111/1467-9582.00067
- Piaget, J. (1959). *The Language and thought of the child*. London: Routledge.
- Rubin, J. (1975). What the good language learner can teach us: *TESOL Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1975): 41-51.
- Rubio F (2007). "Self-esteem and foreign language learning, introduction". Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Cambridge.
- Spielberger, C. D. (1989). *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory: Bibliography* (2nd ed.). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Suharno, S. (2010). Cognitivism and its implication in the second language learning parole: *Journal of Linguistics and Education*, 1, 72-96. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.14710/parole.v1i0.811.
- Tran, T.T.T. (2012). A review of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's theory of foreign language anxiety and the challenges to the theory: *English Language Teaching* Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 69-75.
- Tunçel, H. (2015). The relationship between self-confidence and learning Turkish as a foreign language: *academicJournals*, Vol. 10(18), pp. 2575-2589.
- Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Watson, D., & R. Friend. 1969. Measurement of social-evaluative anxiety. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology* 33(4): 448-457.
- Wijayanti, N.D. *Cognitivism of Language Teaching and Learning*. (n.d.) Retrived March 28, 2018, from <https://mydreamarea.wordpress.com/2013/01/05/cognitivism-theory-of-language-teaching-and-learning/>