

Among others, we have the choice of the form of the central dialect to serve as the main entry, the creation and self-validation of neologies, the separate handling of proper names, and the integration of lexical peculiarities.

**THE IMPACT OF LEARNERS' ATTITUDES ON  
SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
LEARNING**

**Motcho Prosper ATCHADE**  
**Université d'Abomey-Calavi**  
**BENIN.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Second language learners' attitudes are said to reflect their beliefs or opinions about the second language and culture, as well as their own culture. Some researchers believe that attitude and motivation are closely related. They claim that integrative and instrumental motivations reflect the basic attitude of the language culture. For example, an English-speaking American's positive attitude and desire to understand Hispanic Americans will lead to high integrative motivation to learn Spanish. The extent to which learners prefer their own language to the one they are learning is also an important attitudinal factor.

By integrative motivation, I mean the motivation which comes from the desire to acculturate and become part of the target language community while by instrumental motivation, I mean the motivation that comes from the rewards gained from knowing another language.

For this article, I define the term "attitude" as the set of beliefs that the learners hold towards the members of the target language group, the target language culture and in the case of classroom learning, towards their teachers and the learning they are given. In other words, attitude refers to the way of feeling, thinking or behaving of the learners. Besides, attitude in language learning can also be viewed as the way learners feel about learning a given language especially as this influences their learning ability. But what is the role of attitudes in second language learning?

I-. The role of attitudes in second language learning  
In second language learning, cognitive factors (factors that attempt to account for the mental processes that enable learners to work on input, and for the knowledge systems which construct and manifest in output) are not the only ones that matter. Affective factors are important as well. Many years of research had led eminent researchers to the conclusion that affective factors can influence second language learning. Savignon (1973) has insisted that affective factor is the single most important

tant factor in second language learning. In the same trend, Schumann (1978c) reports that the affective and personality states provide the essential motor of the cognitive skills that come into play in second language learning.

With respect to affective factors, the most consistent research has been carried out by Gardner (1972) and

his colleagues in Canada and later by Burstall (1975). These studies have focused on language learning. They have revealed the important part played by attitudes in language learning. Indeed, according to the results of their studies, there is a causal relationship between attitudes and learning outcomes. Gardner and his colleagues see in attitudes and motivation a principal cause of more or less successful learning. As for Burstall, successful early learning experience does not only promote successful later learning but also promotes more positive attitudes.

What has mainly interested researchers is the relationship between the affective state with which the learner approaches language learning and the proficiency level reached. What is important is the general acceptance which comes out of the different studies of the role of attitudes in language learning. Learners who have positive attitudes learn more, and also learners who learn well acquire positive attitudes. Given that, there is a causal relationship between attitudes and learning outcomes. But, what are the affective and personality factors which determine or influence second or foreign language learners' attitudes in the process of language learning?

II-. Affective and personality factors in second or foreign language learning.

A. - Affective factors.

According to Gardner (1985), affective factors which determine or influence learners' attitudes to language learning can be divided into two categories: (a) factors prior to the learner's approach to the second or foreign language study and (b) factors that develop during the learning process.

a. - Factors prior to the learner's approach to the second or foreign language study.

Before being placed into a learning situation, learners may entertain different attitudes. These attitudes provide a positive or negative predisposition towards second or foreign language learning. A learner's impression about the second or foreign language and the community and people who speak that language can determine his attitudes

towards learning that language.

The principal motives that prompt learners or the goal pursued by learners are likely to have bearing on their attitudes towards second or foreign language learning. In this respect, Gardner (1985) has laid particular stress on a distinction between the instrumental motivation and the integrative one. For Gardner, in some situations, an integrative motivation may be more powerful in facilitating successful second language (L2) learning. But in others, an instrumental motivation may count far more. However, Burstall (1975) reveals that the two types of motivation are not mutually exclusive. Besides factors prior to the learner's approach to the second or foreign language study, there are other factors that develop during the learning process.

b. - Factors that develop during the learning process.

In the course of the experience of the second or foreign language learning in the classroom setting, a learner can develop different attitudes towards the learning situation. These attitudes may be helpful or detrimental to successful language learning. It depends on the affective condition these attitudes result from. The way the learner feels about learning the language in a particular course and from a particular teacher can lead to the rejection or the acceptance of learning.

If the learning situation is a cause of anxiety for the learner, he is likely to develop a negative attitude towards learning. Moreover, the learner's interpretation of parental feelings about learning the language can also have bearing on his attitude towards second or foreign language learning. The degree of motivation maintained during the progress of a language course is also determinant in the learner's attitude towards the learning situation. A learner who finds for instance a given language course no more interesting is demotivated and is likely to develop a negative attitude. So, the stronger the motivation is, the more positive his attitude will be.

Dulay and Burt (1982), after carrying out some research in affective domain, suggest that the learner has an "affective filter" which governs how much of the input gets through the language processing mechanism. According to their theory, learners do not necessarily attend to all the input they are exposed to. Rather, they attend to some features but filter others out. So, as a result of affective factors, such as attitude influence, the learner is "open" or "closed" to the second or foreign language.

The affective factors in the process of second or foreign language learning are supported by personality factors.

B. - Personality factors

Some personality characteristics provide positive or nega-

tive predisposition towards second or foreign language learning. In fact, learning a new language demands flexibility and openness to the new language norms and norms of social behaviour. An individual who is ethnocentric, that is to say who views the group he belongs to more important than the others, is likely to be predisposed to display a negative attitude towards second language learning. On the other hand, an individual who is anomic that is, who is open to the demands of a different language or culture and critical of the one of his own society is predisposed to learn successfully other languages.

Another trait of personality that has been investigated by researchers is the one of the extroverted individual. Researchers like Strong (1983) claim that the extroverted individual is predisposed to display a positive attitude towards language learning. They found that extroverted learners learn faster. This opinion is based on the assumption that unlike the introverted, the extroverted learner will find it easier to make contact with other users of the target language and therefore will get more input even within a classroom setting. Ellis (1994) advocates that "extrovert learners are sociable, risk-taking, lively, and active, whereas introvert learners are quiet and prefer non-social activities" (p. 518).

Still another aspect of personality is inhibition. Inhibition is viewed by researchers like Guiora et al. (1972) and (1980) as a negative factor with regard to second or foreign language learning. It prevents from taking risks for fear of being disapproved or being laughed at. The inhibited learner is characterized by his hesitancy to say anything in a foreign language. This form of behaviour has been described as "defensive learning" by Stevick (1976). Like affective et personality factors, the social context where the second or foreign language learning takes place can influence the learners' attitudes in the process of the learning.

#### C. - Social influence

According to researchers, the social context may, to some extent, account for a learner's attitude towards a second or foreign language learning. Gardner (1988) instances the social status of the target language in relating it to the learner's mother tongue by the way of illustration. When for instance the target language group is dominant the learner may wish to assimilate with the dominant group. As a result, this can affect his attitude towards learning the target language.

Factors outside the classroom setting may cause the learner to display a negative or positive attitude towards second or foreign language learning. Norrish (1983) explains this by instancing the case of environments where English is used as an official language and at the same time as a *lingua franca*. For Norrish, the "stand-

ard" form of the language as taught in the classroom will have competition from the forms used in contexts outside the school. Both syntax and phonology may differ considerably. Norrish explained this situation by the learner's wish to express solidarity with his own group who speaks the target language as a mother tongue. In such a social context, learners who resist this temptation are said to be imitating the target language group people and as a consequence, are made a fool of. Learners learning under such conditions may not feel secure and can quickly work out a negative attitude towards learning.

There are a number of people whose attitudes can be significant in the process of a second or foreign language learning. Parents, learners, and teachers for example, are people whose attitudes can bear a weight on English language learning. These people are other sources of influence.

#### D. - Other sources of influence

##### a-. Parents.

In African French speaking countries, especially in Benin, English learners' immediate environment is their family. Unfortunately in some of the families, parents behave as if English were not as important as the other subjects their children must learn at school. They willingly buy mathematics textbooks, physics textbooks, etc, but don't bother to buy the prescribed English textbooks for their children. These parents pay for teachers' services at home to help their children learn Mathematics, Biology and Physics whereas they don't do the same thing for English. By observing and experiencing all this phenomenon, English learners are likely to develop a negative attitude towards English learning. So, by giving preference to the other subjects, parents communicate to their children a negative attitude towards English learning.

Parents should be aware of the fact that English learning has become a necessity today. They should see to it that their negative feelings towards English learning don't get in the way of their children's learning the language. For these reasons, parents are expected to avoid holding demotivating talk about English language learning with their children or in places where these children are supposed to be.

Parents in African French speaking countries are especially expected to have a supportive attitude towards their children in supplying these children with all the prescribed textbooks. They may also hire monitors or mentors for their children with regard to the reinforcement of the target language at home and of what is learnt at school. By doing so, they will both communicate a positive attitude to their children towards English learning

and facilitate teachers' teaching task at school

b-. Learners

They do not make any effort to learn English. They do not want to devote much time to English learning. Very often, apart from the classroom learning, they never devote any extra time to English learning. Still worse, they never do their homework. Whenever and wherever they gather to learn in groups, they do nothing but mathematics, physics or biology. Learning English is not their concern.

In addition, though the allocated time to English learning is not sufficient, some learners do not make good use of it by really learning English. It is everyday occurrence for the English teachers in African French Speaking countries to catch some students doing mathematics or physics during English classes. This is common with students whose major is science. Worse, some students even take delight in speaking French or their mother tongue while performing English tasks during English period. Other students skip English classes regularly and never worry about their absence from English classes. By so behaving, it goes without saying that such English learners will never be successful learners.

English learners whose major is science should bear in mind that English is as important as the other subject matters they learn at school; they should bear in mind that knowing English can help them in every field, specifically in the career they will have in the future. It is necessary for them to attend English classes regularly and to make an effort to understand their teachers' lessons.

English learners in African French Speaking countries should seek opportunities to practise English. This practice will enable them to develop a good command of English. To achieve this purpose, they need to put more effort on activities such as reading English books, listening to English programs on TV or Radio, and talking with classmates or people who speak English.

c-. Teachers.

Teachers' attitudes towards learners can also affect the learning which takes place. Learners can hold negative attitudes towards the learning situation if the teacher's agenda is very different from the learners'. Sometimes, this negativity may become severe enough that learners abandon language study completely.

Teachers are expected to know that in language learning, not only cognitive stage (where the learner is involved in conscious activity resulting in knowledge) matters, but also affective factors are important and they should pay attention to them, otherwise, their teaching action will result in failure. Further, teachers of English as a second or foreign language are expected to create a good and trustful atmosphere propitious for a better learning in their classrooms. Now, can positive attitudes foster language profi-

ciency? Or is there any correlation between attitudes and language proficiency?

III-. Correlation between attitude and language proficiency

Correlation between attitude and language proficiency is a controversial issue. Some researchers have found that attitudes bear little influence on second or foreign language learning by children. Macnamara (1973), one of these researchers, states " a child suddenly transported from Toronto to Berlin will learn German no matter what he thinks of German" (p. 37). In the same trend, Genesee and Hamayan (1980) found no relationship between attitude factors and the proficiency in French of six-year-old Anglophone Canadians. Chihara and Ofler (1978) studied the attitudes of Japanese students of English as Foreign Language (EFL) living in Osaka. They found weak correlation between factors from attitude measures and attained EFL proficiency. A similar finding was also reported by Cooper and Fishman (1977) who found that " positive attitudes towards English speakers were largely irrelevant to Israelis learning and using English" (p. 272).

Nevertheless, the role of attitude in second or foreign language should not be ignored. Many studies have found positive correlation between attitudes and language proficiency. Van Els et al. (1984) state " most of the Canadian studies demonstrated that, a positive attitude towards a target language was related to second language acquisition in the Canadian bilingual setting" (p 119). Other researchers report such relationships. For example, Scherer and Wertheimer (1964) showed that American college students' positive attitudes towards German and towards themselves speaking German were correlated with proficiency in German.

Ellis (1994) expresses the same view when he refers to Gardner, Lalonde and McPherson (1985) who found that "learners of L2 French with favourable attitudes showed little decline, while those with less favourable ones showed significant loss in self-rated proficiency six months after an intensive course" (P.209).

A study by Hermann (1980) revealed a similar view after studying a group of 750 German children learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Hermann provided evidence which suggested that those children who had been studying English for five years showed a significantly higher level of positive attitude towards the target culture than a group who had just started to study English. Moreover, the lower-proficiency learners showed significantly more prejudice than the higher-proficiency group.

Hermann (1980) explains her findings by saying that "the mere satisfaction a learner derives from his or her

achievement of the learning task may influence his or her attitude to the ethno-linguistic group in question and even result in a change of such attitude" (p. 249). This assumption serves as an explanation for the fact that Savignon (1972) found no correlation between early attitude and measures of final achievement of American College students in their first semester of French study at the University of Illinois. However, as this study progressed, the correlation between their attitude and their achievement in French increased substantially. These reports suggest that, success in second or foreign language learning may breed positive attitudes towards a target language group, just as Strong (1984) had asserted that success contributes to heightened motivation to acquire or learn a second language.

Second or foreign language teachers should be aware of a positive correlation between language learners' attitude and language proficiency. This awareness can help language teachers make decision about their teaching, and this decision making can call for some teaching implications which refer to teaching practice orientation to learners' attitudes.

#### Teaching practice orientation to learners' attitudes

I think that, if second or foreign language teachers accept the importance of learners' attitudes in L2 learning, they must cultivate an awareness of individual learners' attitudes, individual learners' differences, that is, differences which vary with the L2 learners' age, sex, background, socio-economic status, etc. This awareness must extend to choosing teaching materials that are truly communicative in nature. Students need real life problems to solve in the second language. They need activities which can be simulated in the classroom or can actually be carried out in the community. Role-play (with specific instructions) as well as self-awareness activities that concentrate on personal feelings, opinions and the attitudes the L2 learner are invaluable stimuli for productive communication. Small-group work can be used to provide more opportunities for meaning negotiation. This can help acquisition of L2.

I think communicative approaches should be valued because the orientations of communicative approaches are more holistic or more humanistic. They attempt to provide a non-threatening environment where teacher and classmates provide support to each second or foreign language learner. In this way, the teacher can deal with complex affective aspects of the learners' attitudes, personality factors that have impact on second or foreign language learning.

It is possible to foster a more language attitude by se-

lecting as a teacher, appropriate tasks based on the learner's interests, motives, and needs. Haln et al. (1989) in the "German attitude survey", attempted to determine the learner's attitudes towards foreign language study, reasons for studying German and opinions about oral language activities. The authors recommend that some form of students evaluation or informal assessment be used to determine the appropriateness of learning activities and testing procedures. According to Haln and his associates, grading policies and certain types of language activities can affect the stress factor as well as motivation attitudes. For them, the teacher may decide to use a case-study approach as a means of comparing attitudes. This study may lead teacher to find that students can have attitudes which generate some learning styles and these learning styles can be reflected by the way the students perceive, interact and respond to the teaching environment.

It is important for teachers to determine the ways their students learn in order to help them acquire the target language more efficiently. Paying special attention to the attitudes of learners should be a key concern when designing learning tasks. This implies that teachers have to make changes in their instructional plans. They have to reflect on the complexity of learning tasks rather than focusing only on classroom techniques.

#### CONCLUSION

Social factors have a major impact on second or foreign language proficiency but probably do not influence it directly. Rather, their effect is mediated by some variables. Ellis (1994) states that "one set of variables which have been found to be of major importance is learner attitudes. Social factors help to shape learner attitudes which, in turn, influence learning outcome" (p. 197). What Ellis is saying is that attitudes can reflect the particular social settings in which learners find themselves. According to Ellis then, learner attitudes have an impact on the level of L2 proficiency achieved by individual learners and are themselves influenced by this success. In other terms, learners with positive attitudes who experience success will have these attitude reinforced whereas learners' negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success. I think, because of the importance of the learner's attitudes in L2 learning, that the notion of teaching learning strategies should receive increasing attention in teacher education programs. Teachers should be as aware as possible of the individual attitudes of their students and work towards meeting their individual needs. This implies that teachers should use a variety of approaches in their class because one approach alone will not satisfy

the demands of language learners of different ages, learning styles, and diverse background. Classroom approaches should take into consideration that more than cognitive factors need attention in the second or foreign language acquisition process.

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#### RESUME

Cet article a exploré la corrélation entre le degré de compétence que les étudiants d'une deuxième langue ou d'une langue étrangère atteignent et les attitudes dont ils font montre, en apprenant la langue ciblée. Cette exploration effectuée sur la base d'une analyse du rôle que les attitudes jouent dans le processus de l'apprentissage d'une deuxième ou d'une langue étrangère a révélé qu'il existe une relation causale entre les attitudes des étudiants et le niveau de leur compétence dans la langue acquise.

Plusieurs facteurs (affectifs, sociaux, etc.) et d'autres sources d'influence contribuent à cette relation causale. Des recherches ont rapporté que de bonnes attitudes adoptées par les étudiants conduisent à la bonne maîtrise de la langue visée. Compte tenu de l'importance de l'impact que les attitudes ont sur l'acquisition d'une langue étrangère et d'une deuxième langue, cet article suggère aux enseignants de langue, des pratiques didactiques susceptibles de faciliter l'apprentissage de la langue cible.

Il a été aussi conseillé que les programmes de formation des Enseignants de langue tiennent compte de la corrélation positive entre les attitudes des étudiants et leur succès linguistique pour déterminer et créer des activités qui favorisent l'amélioration des styles d'études susceptibles de répondre aux différences individuelles des étudiants.