

The Effect of Attitude and Motivation on College English Learning and Teaching

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Abstract: It is argued that attitudes are directly related to motivation, which in turn is directly related to L2 learning. Attitude and motivation are important factors, which help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners. The learners' motivation and attitude toward English is always an influential element for the quality. Teachers should at first get to know the learners' motivation and attitude toward this course so as to teach the course well.

Keywords: attitude, motivation, college English learning and teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning is affected by a great number of factors, among which motivation and attitude play an important role. Attitude is closely related to motivation. In the early literature on the role of attitude and motivation in L2 learning (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, 1972) attitudes and motivation have usually been put together into a cluster of factors which were held jointly responsible for relative success or failure in L2 learning. More recently, however, the distinctive roles of attitude and motivation have been redefined (Oller, 1977; Gardner, 1979). It is argued that attitudes are directly related to motivation, which in turn is directly related to L2 learning. In other words, attitudes should be viewed as motivational supports and not as factors which have a direct effect on L2 learning. Moreover, motivation to learn a language is not only determined by attitudes, but also by other motivational props such as the desire to please teachers, parents, experience of success promise of a reward, etc.

2. MOTIVATION

Motivation is made up of effort, but as Gardner point out (1985), there are several potential components of effort, such as compulsiveness, desire to please a teacher or parents, a high need to achieve, good study habits, social pressures, including examinations or external rewards, which do not relate specifically to learning a language. There are two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation refers to motivation to acquire a

language as means for attaining instrumental goals: furthering a career, reading technical material, translation, and so forth. An integrative motive is employed when learners wish to identify themselves with and become a part of that society. (Gardner, 1985) Many researchers believe that integrative motivation played a significant role. Like Lamberg (1972) and Spolsky (1969) found that integrative motivation generally accompanied higher scores on proficiency tests in a foreign language.

2.1 Motivation towards Classroom and L2 Teacher

To the motivation type of their students, English teachers should be sensitive enough. Some teachers may prefer to use assimilation as a way to target cultures in foreign languages. In my opinion, regardless of the type of motivation is more influential in foreign language learning, we can not deny that the motivational learning process of foreign languages is indeed played a crucial role.

In China, most foreign language learners don't have many chances to contact with native speakers or the foreign language culture, the goal of learning a new language is to find a good job, or to be able to use the language in their career. Especially for adults, the phenomenon is more obvious, because most adult language learners are motivated by their work needs. There might be a little part of language learners who want to go abroad and become one member of that society. Therefore, instrumental motivation might be the important factor to cause successful language learning in China.

3. ATTITUDE

Most theorists would seem to agree that the term 'attitude' refers to some aspects of an individual's response to an object or class of object (Lett, 1977). Attitude can be described as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Attitudes have often been considered in terms of the following components (Krech et al. 1962):

- (1) A cognitive component, which refers to one's beliefs about the object;
- (2) An affective component, which refers to the amount of positive or negative feeling one has towards the object;
- (3) A cognitive component, which refers to one's behavioral intentions, or to one's actual behavior towards the object.

However, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggest that the term 'attitude' should be applied to only the affective component. In fact, most attitude scales which have been used in research only measure the affective component.

Stem (1983) classifies a number of different attitudes he investigated into three types:

- (1) Attitudes towards the community and people who speak the L2, for example,
 - A) I would like to go to France.

- B) I would like to get to know some French people.
- (2) Attitudes towards learning the language concerned, for example,
 - A) Learning French is a waste of time.
 - B) The more I get to know French people, the more I would like to learn their language.
- (3) Attitudes towards language and language learning in general, for example,
 - A) I would like to speak many languages.
 - B) I am not interested in learning a foreign language.

There is agreement that attitudes are learned (and therefore, capable of modification by further learning) and that they are relative stable or enduring. In general, positive attitudes towards the L2, its speakers, and its culture can be expected to enhance learning and negative attitudes to impede learning.

3.1 Attitudes towards the L2 and L2 Speakers

Of those attitudes which have a special relevance for L2 learning, attitudes towards the L2 and L2 speakers have been most positively researched. Most of the Canadian studies discussed on motivation showed positive attitudes towards the L2 language group to lead to an integrative motivation to learn their language, which was in turn strongly related to L2 learning success in the Canadian bilingual culture setting. There seemed to be a fairly strong, though indirect, relationship between positive attitudes and L2 proficiency.

Other studies have shown the strength of the correlation between attitudes and proficiency to vary with age of the learner and learning context.

In a study of six-year-old anglophone Canadian children learning French, Genesee and Hamayan (1980) found no relationship between attitude factors and proficiency in French. Presumably, young children have not yet developed strong positive or negative feelings towards speakers of other language. In Oller's study (1977) of Chinese-speaking foreign students at American universities, attitudes towards the target language group were positively correlated with proficiency.

These studies suggest that the correlation between attitude variables and attained proficiency tends to be stronger in bilingual contexts where there are many opportunities for learners to communicate with target language speakers than in monolingual contexts, where such opportunities are limited.

In most of the studies discussed so far it has been assumed that the attitude is to be seen as the cause of success in L2 learning. However, this assumption has been challenged in Savignon's study (1972). Savignon reported that student's desire to learn French increased with gains in French proficiency. The results of his study suggest that positive attitudes are a function of learning success rather than vice versa.

3.2 Attitudes towards the Classroom and L2 Teacher

This factor may relate to L2 learning (Krashen, 1988). Learners will inevitably have very different views about learning situation and the kind of teacher they think is best for them. For instance, some prefer a teacher who is relaxed and informal to pursue their own learning paths. Others may react better to a teacher who is very formal and controlling. Naimon et al. (1978), in their study of French as a second language in Toronto, reported that the student's attitude was the best predictor of success. Bialystok (1977) reported that evaluation of the learning situation was a good predictor of reading comprehension. Gardner et al. (1976) found that evaluative reactions to the learning situation were associated with grades in levels 7 and 11 in French as a second language in Canada.

4. THE RELATION BETWEEN ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION

Motivation and attitudes help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners. Motivation itself may be the result of previous learning experiences, and past experiences also play a major role in shaping attitudes to language learning. Attitudes are directly related to motivation, which in turn is directly related to L2 learning. There is some evidence to show that extroverted learners will do better in acquiring basic interpersonal communication skills because of more opportunities to practice and introverted learners will do better at developing cognitive academic language ability because of their spending more time reading and writing.

The relation of attitude to motivation is dependent on the type of motivation. For example, an integrative motivation presupposes a positive attitude of the learner towards target language speakers and their culture, but a learner who is instrumentally motivated does not necessarily have a positive attitude towards the target language group.

In addition of the relation between attitude and motivation, it is worth mentioning that the effects of motivation and attitudes appear to be separate from the effects of aptitude. It is possible to have high aptitude and low attitudes/ motivation (Krashen, 1988:19). Thus, the most successful learners will be those who have both a talent and high level of attitudes /motivation for learning.

5. THE EFFECT OF ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION IN COLLEGE ENGLISH LEARNING AND TEACHING

Gardner (1968) presented that teachers' attitude plays a role in motivating students to learn a second language. In our classroom, teachers could play a stimulating and facilitating role to motivate students in many ways, for instance, the use of multi-media and diversified activities in the class to cultivate students' academic performance. College English teachers could have a full understanding of the students in their class. They may build personal English learning files for them, praise and encourage them timely on any point of progress in order to enhance the

students' sense of achievement, especially for those whose grades are a little lower. As a result, students will be confident in English learning. The more they learn, the better they will be, the more interest they have. This type of motivation and cognitive factors are inseparable. And through this way of learning, once it was realized that individual learner differences are not completely independent variables but interact with one another, the relationship of attitudes and motivation with achievement could be interpreted taking into account their interactions with such factors as language learning styles and strategies, learner beliefs, self-concept etc. Although we still lack a model of learner attitudes and motivation that would comprise all relevant relationships with other individual variables, we are coming closer to understanding the complexity of their joint impact on language achievement.

In conclusion, attitude and motivation serves as an important role in language learning and teaching. The English learning context in China entails multifarious factors of motivation that brings about both positive and negative influence in students' English acquiring process. And teacher's attitude and strategies could also be a crucial factor that motivate and facilitates students to obtain comprehensive abilities in English learning process.

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