

Language Learning: The Importance of Motivation

Since globalization has started, it has become more important to learn another language. I have been learning English for almost eight years and I realize how difficult it is to acquire a new language unless the language has very similar features with a person's first language. Gardner (2001) insists there is a close interaction between motivation and language learning success. To establish language learners' motivation toward language learning, they should know the advantages of learning a new language. Also, Engin (2009) insists that learners need to understand what types of motivation they have because certain motivation brings them a greater success. To acquire a foreign language successfully, the learners need motivation and teachers who support their learning.

Advantages of language learning

Learning languages has many advantages. Hanna Lin, who is from Taiwan, learned German when she was in university and earned her Master of Arts in German studies. Now, she has her doctorate and runs the ESL program at Algoma University. Lin describes the advantages of learning languages as getting a job, finding another perspective of the world and traveling. She said, "Especially since English is an international language, you can communicate with a lot of people in the world when you travel. It makes you to travel easier" (Lin, personal communication, February 28, 2013).

Another example about the advantages of learning a new language comes from Megumi Matsumoto, a Japanese mainstream student at Algoma University. Matsumoto said the advantages of learning a foreign language are communicating with people from overseas, learning new cultures, making more opportunities for getting a job, and making friends in

other countries. She said, “We can communicate with people from the country and know their culture. It is very interesting and fun to know them and to communicate with those people. Also we can be friends with them” (Matsumoto, personal communication, February 28, 2013).

According to these interviews, the advantages of learning a new language are not only to get a good job, but the language skill lets people broaden their views of the world, and enables them to rebuild identities. That is to say, learning another language could make our life more valuable and enjoyable.

Motivation

Zhang and Fu (2008), Shahriar, Pathan, Mari and Umrani (2011), and Engin (2009) investigated English as a Second Language students’ motivation. They focused on how to arouse the learners’ motivation, the interaction between the learners’ motivation and the learning environment, and the relationship between language learning success and motivation types respectively.

Motivation Types

Two important types of language learning motivation are integrative and instrumental motivation. Gardner (2001) defines integrative motivation as an eagerness to be a member of the target language’s community (p. 9). Those learners have strong interests in the target language and its culture. On the other hand, Gardner (2001) describes instrumental motivation as using the language as a tool for one’s career such as getting a good job and being well educated (p.10). He also states it is possible for a learner to have both types of motivation.

Shahriar et al. (2011) argue that since English is an international language,

integrative motivation is not a common purpose of learning English any more. Instrumental motivation is the most common motivation among the students. However, Engin (2009) states that the students have enough integrative motivation in his research. This gap between those two researchers might be caused by the different types of participants, and the different sizes of their research populations.

Engin (2009) defined the ratio of learners' motivation types. According to his research, the learners have more positive attitudes toward integrative motivation than toward instrumental motivation. Also, he demonstrates that there is a close relationship between integrative motivation and the second language learners' success in their study. Engin states, "Integrative motivation depends on personal willingness and desire to achieve something. Therefore, integrative motivation is likely to be more effective than instrumental motivation for students learning a foreign language" (2009, p.1039). Since integrative motivation comes from the learners' strong interests in the target language, the learners with this type of motivation can approach learning the language more positively than the learners who have instrumental motivation. Engin (2009) also states that the more positive approach language learning brings, the more benefits come to them. Positive motivation has a strong influence on the learners' success (Engin, 2009, p.1040). This means that integrative motivation enables the learners to learn more than just the language. Integrative motivated learners can understand the culture and the people deeply, learn those people's way of thinking, and acquire a new culture. These things encourage the learners to open their eyes widely toward the world and to reform their identities.

Thus, integrative motivation would be more beneficial than instrumental motivation. According to Gardner (2001), a learner could have both integrative and instrumental

motivation. Therefore, even if the learner's primary motivation is instrumental, it will be more beneficial and effective to have integrative motivation too.

The Teacher's Role

According to Zhang and Fu's research, the important point is "not what motivates learners but what directs and shapes their motivation" (2008, p.49). Therefore, they suggest to improve the class concepts and to set goals for those learners. Setting appropriate goals helps learners to see what they should do clearly, and to arouse their motivation too. These steps need the teacher's help. Zhang and Fu (2008) say the obstruction to acquire a new language is the learners' low motivation. Therefore, teachers are on a very important position of language learning to provide their students with high motivation.

Shahriar et al. (2011) also argue the importance of the teacher. They insist language learners know the usefulness of learning another language and they show their willingness to attend their language class. However, most of the students are not satisfied with their learning environment, the teacher, the class, or the assessment test (pp.103-105). Shahriar et al. (2011) say that learners' satisfaction and their success in language learning are related. The researchers state the big factors which prevent the learners' study are boredom and dissatisfaction with the learning environment. Therefore, they argue especially the teachers need to be improved to make their class activities more interesting. Shahriar et al. (2011) also do not mention which is more effective motivation, integrative or instrumental but state, "strong motivation brings successful learning, be it integrative or instrumental" (p. 100).

As for Engin's (2009) study, he investigated language learners' motivation and its types. He also describes the teacher as the important person who helps the students to form their motivation and makes them aware of the importance of motivation. If those students

understand how motivation affects their language learning, they will make remarkable improvements in their language study.

Zhang and Fu (2008) argue that language learners need to know the right way of arousing their motivation because this will encourage the learners to progress with their study. Shahriar et al. (2011) discuss concern about the language learning environment (teachers, textbooks, syllabus and contents) in order to keep the learners' motivation. Including Engin's study, all three research studies insist that teachers play an important role to encourage their students to have and keep their motivation, but Zhang and Fu (2008) and Shahriar et al. (2011) do not mention which motivation (integrative or instrumental) is more effective and important. Their two studies describe how strong motivation (either integrative or instrumental) can bring success in the learners' study. However, Engin (2009) insists integrative motivation is more effective than instrumental.

Important Tips for Language Learning

As for the important keys to learn a new language, Matsumoto lists smiling, understanding the people and their culture, having a strong mind, and being sociable as important: "Don't think negatively and don't give up. Also, it is very important to live in the culture. Then you need to be tough and strong, and be sociable. Don't wait for people to speak to you. You should act of your own accord" (Matsumoto, personal communication, February 28, 2013). Lin explains: "Open your mouth and use the language. Don't be afraid to speak and make mistakes. If you don't speak the language, nobody knows whether you don't know how to speak the language or you don't want to speak with the people. It will cause you to lose your opportunities to interact with the people in the community" (personal communication, February 28, 2013). Both interviewees said the learners need to make action,

and should not be afraid of making mistakes. Those learners have to be strong to acquire the language.

Conclusion

According to Engin's study (2009), integrative motivation is more effective and important in language learning than instrumental motivation. The learners who have integrative motivation could learn more than the language and develop their perspective toward the world. Therefore, even if their primary motivation is instrumental, it is worth it to try to find interests in the target language's background. Then, people's language learning efficiency will be better and they can get more benefits. Through Zhang and Fu (2008), Shahriar, Pathan, Mari and Umrani (2011), and Engin's (2009) research, it is clear that in the language learning field, teachers are in a very important position. They should teach their students the importance of motivation, and make the class interesting in order to arouse and keep students' motivation. Also, those learners need to have confidence and use the language as much as possible without hesitation. Being able to use the language is the most important part in improving language skills.

References

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