

HPEN7005 (ELTE): Assignment 1

Factors Affecting Second Language Learning and Aptitude

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Learning a second language is a difficult process that calls for consideration of cognitive, cultural, social, and psychological elements. The rate and degree of second language competency might vary depending on an individual's learning preferences and goals. Together with personality, intelligence, age, motivation, and attitudes, aptitude is another element that is typically thought to be important for language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). The following is a list of some of the most significant factors that might influence the process of learning a second language in Chapter 2 from Lightbown and Spada.

Intelligence

A number of academics are of the opinion that intelligence may be categorised as either a singular talent, a collection of separate innate qualities, or a hierarchy of varying degrees of capability. Language ability has always been seen as one of the most essential aspects of intelligence, and conventional intelligence tests reflect this. According to Oller and Perkins (1978), there is a tight correlation between a person's language acquisition capacity and their total IQ. Nevertheless, this viewpoint has been contested by scholars in first language acquisition. Children with varying IQs may become competent masters of their mother tongue due to the fact that intelligence is not a determining factor while learning one's first language. Hence, intellectual characteristics have a significant impact on learning. Lightbown and Spada were certain that it is crucial to keep in mind the complex character of the term "intelligence" and the reality that individuals possess a broad range of talents and abilities, not all of which can be measured by standard IQ tests (2001).

While the function of intelligence in SLA cannot be overlooked, it is essential to

bear in mind that “intelligence” is a multifaceted concept and that a person has a variety of skills and talents. Strong academic achievement is not always indicative of second language acquisition success.

Aptitude

In the 1920s, aptitude was first measured. Aptitude is described as the intrinsic capacity to acquire information or skills. In SLA, however, many psycholinguists agree with Carroll’s definition: The time needed for a student to master a specific quantity of information is referred to as talent (1965). However, it should be noted that Carroll’s concept stresses external rather than internal elements, talent rather than objective circumstances. Everyone can improve their scores in a foreign language with time. Compared with intelligence, Krashen (1979) believes that the two should not be distinguished. The ability to acquire a second language is referred to as aptitude, which is also a kind of “learning capacity”, not language ability in the sense of “acquisition”. That is, intelligence, which is only related to “learning”. The learner’s intelligence can only be determined by his/her performance in the language test, because only under test conditions is the best opportunity to use the Monitor Model.

With the advent of a more communicative instructional strategy, many instructors and researchers came to see aptitude as unimportant to the language-learning process. Yet, this suggests that few studies have evaluated whether a sound-sensitive skill is effective when classroom instruction is meaning-centered as opposed to metalinguistics-focused (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). Furthermore, based on empirical research, some researchers in China have stated that there is a tight association between a language learner’s aptitude and their cognitive abilities. Aptitude may readily impact second language learning, and its effect and link should be investigated and addressed in more depth.

Regarding aptitude, I will concentrate more on it in the later part of this assignment.

Personality

There are many personality traits that are likely to influence L2 acquisition, including extroversion or introversion, inhibition or risk-taking, self-esteem, anxiety and empathy. Most previous research has focused on how extroversion or introversion may influence a child's ability to learn a new language (Wakamoto, 2000). Furthermore, extroverts are better in terms of fluency, whereas introverts are superior in terms of accuracy, according to the fundamental hypothesis (Ozanska-Ponikwia & Dewaele, 2012). Similar to prior research studying the impact of individual qualities on second language learning, the results of studies evaluating a similar personality component vary. Some research has shown that students who rate highly on extroverted traits like assertiveness and adventurousness are also successful language learners. Nevertheless, other research has found that many successful language learners do not rate highly on extroversion (Lightbown and Spada, 2001).

Motivation and attitudes

Attitudes and motivation have been studied extensively for their impact on second-language acquisition. On the basis of the categorization of motivation for second language acquisition, Gardner et al.(1985) suggested a social education model of second language acquisition that focuses on the interaction between individual variations and language learning. This model proposes a series of variables that affect the performance of second language acquisition, including individual ability, motivation, culture, and language-related variables. Nevertheless, being the single most influential factor in SLA, either success or failure, motivation controls not only the correlation between attitude and accomplishment, but also the correlation between attitude and accomplishment. Anxiety has a causal link with motivation; in informal L2 learning contexts, motivated learners show voluntary learning features. In addition, Gardner et al. created the Attitude/Motivation Test Scale (AMTB) for second language acquisition, which fostered the ongoing investigation of motivation in detail (Gardner, 2001). Motivation is often affected by societal shifts or linkages of power across languages. Those from the majority group who study a minority language may

have different goals and perspectives than those from the minority group who learn their language (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). Nonetheless, in comparison to many static investigations, the outcomes of dynamic studies are quite restricted.

Learner beliefs

The significance of learner beliefs resides in the fact that they significantly influence learner behaviour. Furthermore, the study of learner beliefs may aid in explaining and predicting the behaviour of second language learners. Learners of a second language are not usually aware of their distinct learning styles, but almost all learners, especially older learners, have strong thoughts and opinions about how their education should be presented. These concepts are often derived from one's previous educational experiences and the presumption that a certain teaching strategy is the most efficient (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). Compared to the emphasis placed on L2 learners' general ideas about language acquisition, there has been less study of L2 learners' beliefs concerning grammar and mistake correction in the L2 classroom.

Age of acquisition

The connection between a learner's age and his or her capacity for success in second language acquisition is a topic of vigorous dispute. In 1967, the psycholinguist Lenneberg introduced the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). CPH is of the opinion that the capacity of children to learn new languages is closely related to the development of their brains and that there is a "critical period" for language acquisition; that is, the time before the age of ten is the optimal time for children to learn new languages.

One of the representatives who disagrees with the critical period hypothesis is Krashen, and the "input hypothesis" and the "emotional filter hypothesis" that he proposed are two significant counterarguments to the critical period hypothesis. Krashen asserts that the acquisition of a language is not reliant on one's age but rather on the presence of a vast amount of easily digestible material as well as appropriate emotional filtering (1991). Comparing children and adults as second language

learners is tricky. In addition to the probable biological distinctions described by the CPH, the settings under which language is acquired are often very distinct. In informal language learning situations, younger students often dedicate more time to language acquisition. In addition, their early faulty attempts are often appreciated or at the very least acknowledged. On the other hand, older learners often encounter circumstances that require the use of far more sophisticated vocabulary and the articulation of significantly more intricate thoughts. Adults are often humiliated by their limited command of the language, and they may acquire feelings of inadequacy after encountering difficulties while attempting to express themselves precisely (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). In general, one's age may have a role in the process of learning a second language, but this does not mean that it is the decisive factor in whether or not one would be successful in SLA. The importance of becoming older can't be emphasised enough.

Detailed Introduction to Aptitude Research

As described above, rapid learning is the defining characteristic of aptitude. The 'aptitude' element has been studied most thoroughly by researchers interested in creating tests that might predict whether people would be effective language learners in a classroom environment (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). The Modern Language Aptitude Test, also known as the MLAT, and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery, also known as the PLAB, are the two most widely used aptitude instruments. The MLAT identifies people who are likely to make rapid initial gains in a second language. In contrast, the PLAB includes a measure of inductive learning capacity as well as participants' scores in areas other than languages (Udry, Berthelea &Steiner, 2021). Throughout the course of time, the focus of study switched from attempting to predict how well a person will do in a second language to explaining the underlying mechanisms involved in learning a language. This led in the design of new test instruments that were more linked with contemporary notions on SLA and allowed for the evaluation of aptitude in terms of learning stages or learning contexts. These new test instruments have since been used successfully. Take CANAL-FT (Cognitive

Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language (Foreign) Test) and Hi-LAB for example. The CANAL-FT evaluates language processing techniques such as alternative and unintentional encoding, alternative comparison, alternative combination, and alternative transfer (Grigorenko, Robert & Madeline, 2000). Hi-LAB, is designed to forecast high levels of achievement in more advanced stages of learning (Doughty, 2010). Unfortunately, neither tool has been thoroughly verified with regard to validity and reliability. I agree that, due to the difficulty of processing a second language and the impact of CPH, it is sensible to use an instrument to study the link between linguistic aptitude components and L2 competency.

On the connection between linguistic ability and second language acquisition, Western academics have undertaken a great deal of study in a variety of methods and from a variety of perspectives, while some Chinese scholars have conducted comparable empirical research, and the results are worthy of discussion.

Dai Yuncai (2006) tested the 111 English-majored freshmen at a typical Chinese university, using MLAT as measuring instrument. According to the findings of the study, there is not a discernible gap in the students' performance on the various aptitude tests. This further supports Carroll's contention that aptitude is an intrinsic set of cognitive abilities that are either innate or formed early in infancy. It is difficult to train and adapt, as well as resistant to environmental changes (1981). This research also noted that the impact of MLAT on language learners with diverse first languages may not be the same. For instance, Chinese learners may find the third section of the MLAT, the spelling test, very challenging (Dai, 2006). To my mind, this is because the MLAT's theoretical foundation is the phonemic, syntactic, semantic, and lexical systems of English, making it appropriate for native English learners. Hence, the transfer of Chinese character traits would not only interfere but also mislead Chinese language learners to make incorrect judgements when tested. This might be a major reason why the correlation coefficient between aptitude and second language acquisition in this research is substantially lower than in Western academia.

Li Jingyu (2022) adopted an experimental investigation of the aptitude of non-English major freshmen and the effect of explicit and implicit teaching

approaches on their learning of English attributional sentences. The LLAMA Test, which was created on the basis of the MLAT, was used as the testing instrument. According to the findings of the study, it can be concluded that when it comes to the circumstance of implicit instruction, there is a substantial connection between the grammatical analytic ability test and the immediate and delayed post-tests of writing, as well as the delayed post-test of listening comprehension, which accounts for 9 percent of the data. This indicates that the acquisition impact of students in the implicit instruction group is highly connected to their language learning capacity, particularly their grammatical analysis ability (Li Jingyu, 2022). The findings of this research, in my opinion, lend credence to the assertion that learning a second language via an instructional approach that places a greater emphasis on communication makes innate talent superfluous.

If all other factors remain constant, a language learner's degree of aptitude will impact their effectiveness. While the potential to learn is intrinsic, the effectiveness of language acquisition relies mostly on hard work and effort. Understanding second language learning issues and enhancing second language instruction are greatly facilitated by aptitude tests.

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