UNIT 5 LEARNER FACTORS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION-2

Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This is the second unit on learner factors in second language acquisition. It discusses some more cognitive and affective factors which contribute to second language acquisition. These are:

- cognitive style
- personality factors
- attitude
- motivation

We have concentrated on the research conducted in these aspects and its effect on second language acquisition.

5.1 COGNITIVE STYLE

What is Cognitive Style?

It refers to an individual's typical way of organising his/her universe, and reflects his/her personality or performance and not his/her ability or intelligence. For example, two boys Anwar and Kanwal, look at two different kinds of cars but their responses are quite different. Anwar thinks of how comfortable each car is, whereas Kanwal comments on each car's engine, its capacity and how each car is designed differently. These responses of Anwar and Kanwal show that Anwar focuses on the usefulness of the car and Kanwal on the technical aspects. The former therefore is a functionalist and the latter an analyser. Both the responses reflect different styles of learning or cognitive styles.

Types of Cognitive Styles

a. Field independence - Field dependence

Researchers have broadly identified three different cognitive styles, which they call **field-independence/field-dependendence, reflection-impulsivity**, and **categorization styles**. The cognitive style called field-dependence is defined by a person who cannot consider an object or event separately from the context in which it appears. The context in which an object appears is its field. On the other hand, the

field-independent persons have the capacity to process information or consider an object or event independent of the context. For example, when a person with a field independent cognitive style looks at a painting s/he has no difficulty in finding the central motif of the painting and relating the details to the central motif.

Researchers have related this concept of field independence/field dependence to second language learning. Skehan(1989) noted that the field dependent persons would have greater communicative, greater conversational resourcefulness, greater negotiation skills, all of which should be beneficial for exposure to language and therefore to language development through interaction. One research group noticed that field independence helped the learners with conventional classroom learning. Another research group found a very significant relationship between field independence and performance on a French oral production test and on a French listening comprehension test. On the other hand, some other researchers did not find any significant difference in how much the learners spoke and how well they spoke among the learners with either the field dependent or field independent cognitive style. These and many other researchers suggest that there is at best, a weak relationship between field independent cognitive style and second language learning.

b.   Reflection - impulsivity

The cognitive style that refers to the degree to which children reflect upon a problem is called reflection - impulsivity. One of the tasks used to find out whether a particular individual is reflective or impulsive is to ask him/her to choose a picture or design that is similar to the standard picture or design. This method is known as matching Familiar Figure Test.

Here is an example of an item taken from the Matching Familiar Figures test. The child is asked to find out which of the following six pictures on the bottom is exactly the same as the 'standard' on the top.
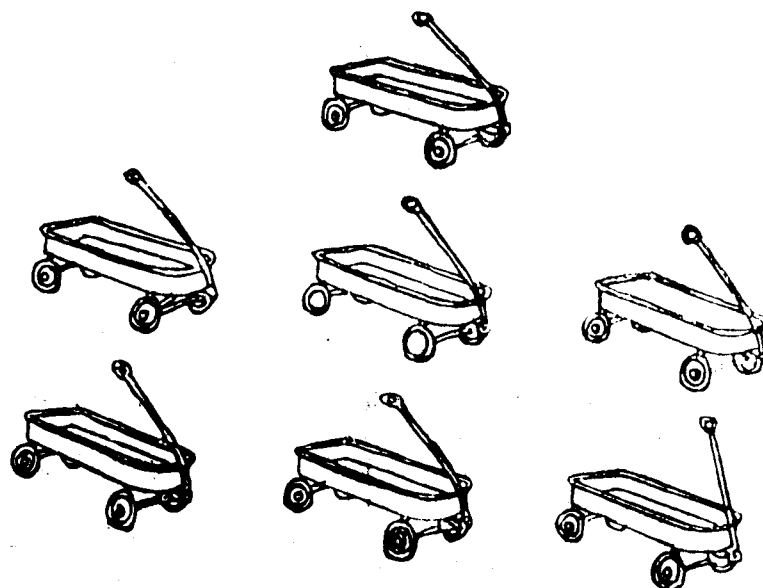
The learners who are faster and less accurate are called impulsive, and those who are slower and more accurate are called reflective. Researchers have shown that learners after the age of eleven are better able to answer with greater speed and more accuracy. The tendency to be reflective/impulsive is not fixed and therefore can be altered with training.

c.   Categorization Styles

The cognitive styles broadly called categorization styles refer to how an individual classifies or arranges information, things or objects. They have been subdivided into three types:

I.	descriptive	-	analytic style
II	categorical	-	inferential style
III	relational	-	contextual style

A descriptive - analytic cognitive style concentrates on a single detail common to all objects. A categorical - inferential style focuses on the class of objects, whereas a relation - contextual focuses on a common theme or function.

Each of these cognitive styles may have its effect on second language learning. Though the field independent/field dependent cognitive style has been explored in detail in relation to second language learning, other cognitive styles need to be studied in detail in this context. It is felt that a difference in the cognitive style of a learner may make a significant difference in success in second language learning. It is also important to remember that since these differences are highly individual they should be kept in mind at the time of selecting teaching strategies and developing any educational curriculum.

5.2 PERSONALITY FACTORS

Review of Research on the Role of Personality

Several researchers (e.g. Pimsleur et. al 1964, Smart et.al 1970, Bartz (1974) have emphasized the importance of personality in foreign/second language learning. Pimsleur et.al (1964) compared average achievers and underachievers in high schools and noted that a successful learner was invariably found to have personality traits such as social conformity, extroversion, flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity. Bartz (1974) found that introversion, soberness and self-sufficiency were strongly correlated with oral components of communicative competence. He further demonstrated that students with traits of imagination, placidness and low anxiety tended to score higher on the written components of communicative competence test.

Naiman, Frohlich and Stern (1975) found that teachers viewed successful students as meticulous, mature, responsible, self-confident, extrovert, independent, passive, shy and introverted. The apparently contradictory traits appealed to different teachers differently. Unsuccessful students, on the other hand, were most frequently described as demonstrating a lack of self-confidence and as being timid, shy, careless, afraid to express themselves and nervous.

Pritchard (1952) reported a particularly high correlation of .94 between sociability and ratings of French fluency of 33 grammar school students. Some support for a link between sociability and second language acquisition was also provided by Chastian (1975). He tested 80 students of French, 72 of German, and 77 of Spanish introductory university level courses, administering among other measures the MarloveCrowne Scale (Crowne and Marlowe 1964) which assesses the extent to which students are outgoing. He obtained significant positive correlation between this test and grades in German and Spanish, but not French. Smart et.al 1970, found that a dimension of 'social spontaneity' differentiated overachievers from average achievers but did not distinguish underachieves from either group. That is, overachievers were significantly lower in social spontaneity than average achievers, indicating that they tended to be introverted. They do not enjoy social activities, prefer not to be in crowds, do not spend their free time at social functions, seldom take the initiative at social gatherings, work better by themselves, and prefer to work alone (Smart et.al 1970, 419).

The study by Naiman et.al (1975) demonstrates that individuals with high levels of anxiety are less successful in learning second languages than more relaxed

individuals. Two researchers (Krashen 1981; Rivers 1964) consider anxiety as a potent deterrent to second language achievement.

Taylor, Catford, Guiora and Lane (1971) hypothesize that the 'more sensitive an individual is to the feelings and behaviours of another person the more likely he is to perceive and recognize the subtleties and unique aspects of the second language and incorporate them in speaking' (147). Research literature supporting this hypothesis is questionable. Naiman et.al (1978) obtained negative results using Hogan's Empathy Scale. They found no relationship between this measure of empathy and scores on the International French Achievement test (r=.01) or performance on an imitation test focusing on French pronunciation (r=.03). Genesee and Hamayan (1980) failed to find any positive relationship between personality variables and achievement. Even Strong (1983) working on a group of kindergarteners in a California school did not find any relationship between a measure of extroversion and various measures of structure, vocabulary and pronunication of the target language. Thus, it is evident that the question whether certain personality traits help language learning is still an open question. Skehen (1989) suggests that future research must firstly attend more vigorously to contextual factors such as the age of the extroverts in the younger age group may have different correlationship with language proficiency as compared to the older extroverts. Similiary, extroverts learning a second language in a formal situation may not have the same set of correlations with proficiency in the second language as the extroverts learning it in a naturalistic environment. Secondly, future research must also try to improve the definition of the trait-contrast as used in language learning. For example, a construct like extroversion may have certain meaning as it is used in psychology, but it may have a restricted meaning in second language learning. Thirdly, the instruments used to measure personality traits need to be more systematic and reliable.

How in Personality Measured?

Personality traits in a person have been elicited by psychologists in a number of ways. Most commonly, a questionnaire consisting of several statements is given and the subject is asked to agree or disagree with them on a 5-point scale, ranging from 'not at all' (scored 'I') to 'very often ' (scored '5'). The aggregate score on the statements is regarded and score for the trait measured. Not all traits are assessed by agreement or disagreement to verbal statements. For example, in the technique called Thematic Appreciation Test (TAT) the subject is presented with a number of pictures usually of people involved in somewhat ambiguous situations, and is asked to write a story about each. These responses are analysed to find out the personality traits of the subjects.

5.3   ATTITUDE

What is attitude?

According Allport (1954:45), "an attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all object and situations with which it is related.' In operational terms an individual's attitude is according to Gardner (1985) 'an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent (p.9)'.

Review of Research on the Role of Attitudes

The nature of attitude of a second language learner can vary from the attitude towards the teacher or the language itself or the group that speaks the language. It may also refer to more general dispositions such as ethnocentrism, authoritarianism or anomie.

Attitudes towards learning the second language and the second language community have received more attention than other factors in second language research. Some researchers support the belief that measures of attitudes towards learning a second language and the second language community correlate significantly with achievement. For example, Lambert and his associates at McGill University conducted a series of studies (Gardner & Lambert 1972) to investigate the role of attitude in second language learning and came to the conclusion that 'a friendly outlook towards the other group whose language is being learnt can differentially sensitize the learner to the audio-lingual features of the language, making him more perceptive to forms of pronunciation and accent than is the case for a learner without this open and friendly disposition'. (Gardner & Lambert 1972:134).

Spolsky (1969) argues strongly that 'one of the most important attitudinal factors is the attitude of the learner to the language and to its speakers' (p.274). In an investigation of 315 foreign students from 80 different countries living in the U.S.A., he found significant association between the perception of similarity between self and English speakers and grades in English. Similarly, Oller, Hudson and Liu (1977) found achievement in the second language correlating highly significantly to evaluative reactions to the target language group. Burstall (1975) quotes several studies which show a positive correlation between attitudes and achievement. But she is skeptical about the causal relationship between the two. She quotes the NFER evaluation which shows that an early achievement in French affected later attitudes towards — and achievement in French to a significantly greater extent than early attitudes towards French affected the subsequent development of attitude or achievement. The initial success or failure in language learning may thus be a powerful determinant of linguistic attitudes.

Research in second language learning has also shown that success or failure in a second language is also related, though weakly, to general disposition of the learners such as ethnocentrism or authoritarianism. Gardner and Lambert (1972) believe that:

> Learners who have strong ethnocentric or authoritarian attitude or who have learned to be prejudiced towards foreign people are unlikely to approach the language learning task with an integrative outlook (p.16).

> Authoritarianism refers to anti-democratic feelings and is generally measured through respect for authority, use of force, nationalism, etc. Agreement or disagreement with some of the following statements may elicit the second language learner's task with an integrative outlook (p.16).

Authoritarianism refers to anti-democratic feelings and is generally measured through respect for authority, use of force, nationalism, etc. Agreement or disagreement with some of the following statements may elicit the second language learners' authoritarian/democratic disposition:

1. Children should always obey their elders.
2. Eve-teasing or rape is a serious crime; the culprits should be hanged in public.
3. If people would talk less and work more, everybody will be better off.
4. What young people need is strict discipline and the will to work for the country.

Ethnocentrism, on the other hand, refers to people who suspect foreign people and ideas and is generally measured through attitude towards the foreigners, preservation of nationality, respect for national symbols, etc. Agreement or disagreement with the following statements can elicit second language learners' ethnocentric tendencies:

1. Certain people who do not salute the national flag should be punished.

2. India is surrounded by enemies on all sides: we should strengthen our armed forces very fast.

3. Epics greater than 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' cannot be written.

4. Indian women are chaster than women elsewhere in the world.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) examined the influence of these dispositions in learning second languages in Maine, Louisiana, Connecticut and Philippines. It is only in the Connecticut study that authoritarianism was found to have significant correlations with achievement variables other than listening comprehension. In Maine, the ethnocentric syndrome is not directly related to any of the French achievement measures. In the Connecticut study, ethnocentrism configurates only with achievement variables of free speech. Similarly, in the Louisiana study ethnocentrism configurates only with one component of listening comprehension. Khanna (1983) working with undergraduates found very significant correlations between achievement in English and authoritarian and ethnocentric tendencies.

Some Unresolved Issues

Research on the relationship between attitudes towards the target language and achievement in it has raised several issues. It has been found that attitudes towards learning languages are more related to language achievement than attitude towards any other school subject. Further, some aspects of attitude are more highly related to language achievement than others. Some research has shown girls to be better second language learners than boys. Attitudes have also been found to be influenced by the students' upbringing. Attitudes towards the target language vary from one geographical area to another. Some research has shown that attitude towards learning a second language becomes less positive with age because learners become more mature and aware. It is also noticed that as learners grow older, the correlations between the attitudes towards the target language and achievement grow higher. though less positive. More research needs to be done on the effect of age and sex on evaluative reactions towards the target language speakers. Research has shown that the learners who had more exposure to the target language also had more exposure to the target language speakers. It has also shown that the learners who had more exposure to the target language also had more favourable attitudes towards it.

5.4 MOTIVATION

What is Motivation?

The term motivation in the second language learning context is seen according to Gardner (1985) as 'referring to 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 (p.10)'. The desire to learn the language, or favourable attitudes towards learning the second language, do not reflect motivation in and of themselves. The individual may wish to learn the second language and may enjoy doing it, but, if this is not accompanied by a striving to do so, then it is not motivation in the real sense. It is only when the desire to learn the second language and favourable attitude towards it are linked with the effort or drive to achieve it, then we can say that the learner is motivated.

Types of Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) have done pioneering work to explore the nature of motivation specific to language study. They built on Mowrer's (1950) concept of identification, which is the tendency of the child to imitate the parent in first language development. They considered the extent to which people esteem and want to identify with not only particular individuals but also foreign peoples. Gardner & Lambert

suggested that those people who identify positively with the target language group would like to resemble the target language group, understand their culture, and be able to participate in it. This pattern of motivation they call an **integrative orientation**. Gardner & Lambert (1972) contrasted this orientation with **instrumental orientation** which is characterized by utilitarian objectives such as obtaining admission in a particular course, professional advancement, and so on. The learner's interest in the other group is confined to achieving personal advantages.

In order to elicit these motivational orientations, statements such as the following have been devised.

Integrative Motivation

I am studying English because

1.   It will help me to mix with English people.
2.   It will improve my personality.
3.   It will help me to better understand English people.
4.   It will help me to read and understand and appreciate English literature, music and films.

Instrumental Motivation

I am studying English because

1.   It will help me to get a good job.
2.   It will help me to become a better educated person.
3.   It will help me to get a degree.
4.   It will help me travel anywhere without any difficulty.

Gardner and Lambert initiated the dichotomy of orientations only for the purposes of measurement. They subsequently considered other possible orientations such as manipulative or machiavellian one and argued for developing a procedure for assessing orientations which did not depend upon categorical system (Gardner and Lambert 1971).

Review of Research on Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1950, 1972) showed that success in a foreign/second language learning is likely to be less if the underlying motivational orientation is instrumental rather than integrative. Burstall (1975), however, pointed out, that this hypothesis was examined in the course of NFFR evaluation of the teaching of French in primary schools and only a partial support to the view put forward by Gardner & Lambert could be established. Although pupil's attitude and achievement proved to be closely associated, motivational orientation of individual pupils appeared to be neither exclusively integrative nor instrumental. It is interesting to note that in the Philippines study (reported in Gardner & Lambert 1972) the authors' hypothesis was challenged. Their research showed that in settings where there was an urgency about mastering a second language for utilitarian ends the instrumental orientation to second language learning is very effective. Au's (1988) study gave substantial evidence against the hypothesis that the integrative motive was positively related to second language achievement.

He says:

> How could a less integratively motivated L_2 learner
> emerge as a better learner in some contexts? What
> are these contexts that happen to facilitate the L_2
> achievement of the less integratively motivated learners?

How can some contexts reverse the effect of integrative motivation? Gardner and his associates do not seem to have answers to these questions. Infact as they have paid little attention to these finding, for them these questions simply do not arise.

<div align="right">(Au 1988:22)</div>

For example, in Anisfled and Lambert (1961), Lyczak, Fu and Ho (1976) Clement, Gardner and Smythe (1977,1980) and Wong (1982) either no significant or negative correlations were found between components of motivational, attitudinal and achievement measures.

Gardner's Socio-educational Model

The social psychological model was significantly modified and elaborated in Gardner (1985). This model was more comprehensive than before because it included, in addition to individual differences, the social milieu, the formal and informal language acquisition context and linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes as important components of the model. It also, perhaps for the first time, provided clear definitions of motivation, motivational orientation and the integrative motive. Motivation was seen as a combination of attitudes towards the target language and the effort and desire to learn it. Motivational orientation, on the other hand, was seen as representing ultimate goals of learning the language. They could be integrative, instrumental, manipulative etc. The integrative motive is a hypothetical construct comprising motivation, positive attitudes to the learning situation (i.e. attitudes to the language teacher and the course) and integrativeness (i.e. attitudes to the other community or communities, integrative orientation and interest in foreign languages).

It is surprising that in spite of repeated emphasis on the social milieu and learning context in learning a second language, Gardner (1988: 108-9) considers them as 'Confounding variables'. It is not out of place here to mention that the significance of social environment can be seen through such variables as age, previous language training available, sources of exposure, socio-economic status, physical conditions of the learning situation, patterns of language use in different types of activity, teacher effectiveness etc. The interaction between the social environment and the individual learner can be seen only when variables concerning both the social environment and the individual are systematically measured and analyzed.

Some Indian Studies

Several studies conducted in India and England underline the overwhelming importance of social rather than individual variables. Many of these studies (Agnihotri, Khanna and Mukherjee 1988; Khanna 1983; Khanna and Agnihotri 1982; Sahgal 1983; Virmani 1991; and Sahgal 1992) are concerned with the acquisition of English as a second language in the non-native context of Delhi. English in Delhi is used in a variety of social contexts including mass media, higher education, law, administration, elite social interactions and inter group communication. Khanna, Verma, Agnihotri and Sinha (1990) worked with adult immigrants learning English as a second language in the native British context. They noticed that the teachers' evaluation of the learners proficiency correlated significantly with claimed control, patterns of language use, exposure to English, use of English in the family, motivational orientation and desire to learn English (See Table 3 in Agnihotri and Khanna, 1997). As distinguished from other studies done in India, this study was conducted in a socio-cultural setting where the target language community was present and was also the majority host community.

Is Motivation the Cause or Result of Success?

Another question that has engaged the attention of second language researchers is whether it is the motivation that causes success or vice-versa. Burstall (1975) working with primary school children learning French came to the conclusion that it

is the achievement which is primary and motivation the consequences. Hermann (1980) too argued that it was the degree of success within the instruction which had produced the different motivational orientations. Similar results have been reported by other researchers. However, Gardner (1985) asserts that there is no evidence that differential success influences attitudes and motivation. In the absence of any conclusive evidence about the direction and nature of relationship between motivation and success, more in-depth research is needed which monitors level over time in some detail rather than takes the 'snapshot' approach through test administration at the beginning and end of courses.

5.5   LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have focussed on some more learner characteristics, and the effect of these on second language learning/acquisition. These variables/factors are:

- Cognitive factors
- Personality factors
- Attitude
- Motivation

These factors have been identified, and research conducted all over the world in different environents in several studies.

5.6   KEY WORDS

attitude	the attitude which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language. Positive or negative feelings towards a language or a language group may affect a person's ability to learn a language.
authoritarianism	anti-decomocratic tendencies
anomic	In learning a new language people may emotionally begin to move away from their own language and culture, and at the same time may not be sure about their feelings towards the new language group. This leads to a feeling of insecurity.
ethnocentric	the desire to interact mainly with one's own language group. People with such tendencies are convinced about the superiority of their own culture and language.
field dependent	a learning style in which a learner tends to look at the whole of a learning task which contains many items.
field independent	a learning style in which a learner is able to identify or focus on particular items and is not distracted by other items in the background or context.
motivation	the desire to learn a second/foreign language, and the effort used in learning it. Two types of motivation are sometimes distinguished:

i) **instrumental motivation:** desire to learn a language because it would fulfil certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job, passing an examination, etc.

ii) **integrative motivation**: desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it; the desire is also there to identify closely with the target language group.

target language — the new language which a person is learning.

5.7 REFERENCES

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5.8   QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1.   Who in your observation are better learners, boys or girls? Could you think of some reasons.

2.   How is aptitude different from intelligence? Is there any overlap between the two? Are these genetically determined or are they acquirable? State some evidence in support of your belief.

3.   What is meant by the statement: 'He has an 'ear' for the language?' Elaborate this statement with examples.

4.   You have learnt about several cognitive styles that individual tend to have. Make an assessment of the learning styles of any ten students and classify them in different groups.

5.   Make a list of atleast four instrumental and four integrative reasons for which Indians generally learn English. Also make a list of four instrumental and four integrative reasons for which you learnt your mother tongue.

6.   Make a questionnaire and study the motivational orientations of a group of learners who may have scored more than 80% marks in their Board examination. Comment on the type of orientations they have.

7.   Some people perform better than others in learning a second language. What are the explanations offered by second language learning research?

8.   Learning a second language takes place both in the classroom and outside the classroom. Identify the variables that influence second language learning outside the classroom, and then discuss their relative significance.

SOME USEFUL READINGS

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