THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON EMOTIONS

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to compare several studies with their findings on the connection between foreign languages and the expression of emotion. Is it true that we keep our emotions under better control when we talk about them in a foreign language? Are some foreign languages better suited for the expression of certain emotions, due to their structure? Dewaele (2005) claimed that research regarding expression of emotions in second language acquisition was a field deserving research. Popular science research has focuses on the way that bilinguals can have two different personalities, while multilinguals multiple personalities. The paper argues that this aspect comes from the expression of emotions in the respective languages.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Psychology, Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Education.

1. Introduction

Research on emotions in the language learning experience has received little attention. The few exceptions to this neglect are studies done by Arnold (1999), Ehrman (1996), Horwitz (2001), Horwitz & Young (1991) and Stevick (1996). Garrett and Young (2009: 209) "believe that one reason for this is the neglect of emotion by psychologists during most of the 20th century." These two authors then claim that Damasio's research gave the start for the XXIst century psychologists to research emotions and their interaction with cognition, reason and memory, and introduce these studies into the field of applied linguistics. In 1999, Damasio claimed that emotions were perceived as too subjective, elusive, and vague to be studied scientifically; there was also the belief that emotion and reason were completely separated. Schumann (1998) believed that a positive reaction offered as feedback to language learners encouraged them and motivated them to continue their study.

Popular science online magazines go as far as to claim that a different language means a different personality, that once we change the language we use we change our personality. Grosjean (2011) cites as evidence, apart from scientific studies done by Tripp and Luna, the very words of bilinguals experiencing this phenomenon:

"Bilingual 1: *'When I'm around Anglo-Americans, I find myself awkward and unable to choose my words quickly enough... When I'm amongst Latinos/Spanish-speakers, I don't feel shy at all. I'm witty, friendly, and ... I become very out-going.'*

Bilingual 2: *'In English, my speech is very polite, with a relaxed tone, always saying 'please' and 'excuse me.' When I speak Greek, I start talking more rapidly, with a tone of anxiety and in a kind of rude way...'.*

Bilingual 3: *'I find when I'm speaking Russian I feel like a much more gentle, 'softer' person. In English, I feel more 'harsh', 'businesslike.'"*

The data from the popular science publication is supported scientifically by Dewaele (2005) who underlines the importance of studying the relationship between emotions and studying a foreign language. Pavlenko and Dewaele (2004) have found in their research "a superior emotionality of the first language and the preference for using that language to express emotions." (Garrett and Young 2009: 210) The preference to express ourselves

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emotionally in the first language is related to the fact that it comes to us more naturally to say and show how we feel in our mother tongue. We need not think twice before expressing feelings into words. We may have the feeling that we keep emotions under control in a foreign language as there are other issues preoccupying us before actually expressing those emotions. We tend to focus on remembering the right words in the respective language designating our emotions, as well as on sentence structure in the respective language, and word order. Once our attention is divided towards issues other than emotions, we can no longer say that the emotions are expressed in a pure, raw form. They are not expressed right away, leaving us time to calm down and to have the impression that we can keep them under control.

The fact that language influences personality could have to do with the learners' noticing that different languages have different ways of expressing what they feel. Certain languages may have certain words which learners find to express with great accuracy what they feel. There is also the fact that we tend to associate in our minds different languages with their cultures and with stereotypes we classify their people into. We perceive the English as being more reserved and polite in society, the Americans as more outgoing, the Spanish as very friendly, extrovert, talkative and full of energy, the Russians as connected to high-class culture and romance, as we all know the noble families and their love stories from the novels. A certain country is or should be synonymous with a certain language.

We could also speculate that the mother language makes us feel more exposed to emotions, while with any foreign language we tend to keep emotions under control. This is because in a foreign language we tend to focus on the way the respective language functions. We are not usually as proficient in a foreign language as we are in our mother language. In our mother language, we tend to express ourselves more naturally and automatically. Everything is a closer and more familiar experience in our mother tongue. Emotions are no exception. What is more, we take a distance from the whole reality represented by a foreign language, and especially emotions, as we apply a different way to see the world once we use other words for what we experience.

We could claim that different languages are different perspectives on the world, that they offer different means of understanding and interpretation. Some languages can offer, through the pragmatic interaction, like English, a more reserved approach to expressing emotions. Other languages, such as American English, offers us the opportunity to feel more open when we interact with other people and when we express ourselves. We judge languages through the way dialogues are portrayed in language learning students' books, as well as in films. We could claim that we play different parts when we speak different languages. Speaking a foreign language also implies acting like a native speaker, the way native speakers are portrayed in students' books.

Dörnyei(2005) created a theory concerning three dimensions of the self of a foreign language learner: the "ideal L2 self", the "ought-to self," and the "L2 learning experiences". The ideal self represents what the learner aspires to become, meaning a proficient speaker of the foreign language. The "ought to" self refers to attributes the learner should possess. The L2 learning experiences refer to the way previous experience can influence motivation to learn and attitude towards the respective language.

The model resembles Sigmund Freud's model of id, ego and superego, as we are dealing with an ideal self as an equivalent of the id, an ought-to self as an equivalent of the superego and with an equivalent of the learning experience as an equivalent of the ego. The experience is mediated by what learners wish to achieve and what they ought to achieve. This is, undoubtedly, an experience involving emotions. The learner has to navigate through what he wishes to become in his language learning experience, what he should become and what he actually is. The difference between what we expect, what we should expect and what we

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actually achieve as language learners can lead to emotions such as anxiety. The experiences of the language learners vary from pleasant to unpleasant: "in a study of learners' beliefs about the language learning process, some described their experience as 'traveling to new places,' whereas others described their experience as 'undergoing a painful medical procedure' (Kramsch, 2003, p. 116)." (Garrett and Young 2009: 209) Of course any experience, the experience of foreign language learning included, is subjective. The process of learning a foreign language can make learners deal with all sorts of feelings, from happiness to anxiety.

2. Details Experimental

2.1. Materials and Procedures

The emotional experience related to the language learning experience ranges from the way we feel while learning the respective foreign language, to the way we feel while using it to express feelings and a different personality. We could also add to these experiences the way we feel towards the culture of the respective foreign language, and whether we associate it or not with a country that has conquered our own or has had any authority over it in the past. Any language is not separated from its culture and from associations of various kinds. For example, certain Romanians have feelings of resent towards the Russian language as they associate it in a negative way with their communist past. Russian was imposed to be studied in schools at a time Russia was very powerful and Romania was under communist rule. The French language has a tradition of being studied in Romania, yet certain students resent it and do not enjoy studying it. Various non-philological faculties, such as the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, or the Faculty of Medicine, include in their curricula a seminar of two hours per week of foreign language for their students. They are sent to study in groups English, French, German, Spanish or Italian. Usually, at the Technical University of Civil Engineering students prefer to study English, and if they are sent to study French they are usually not very pleased; they prefer Spanish instead. Professors speculate that this preference is due to the fact that they enjoy Spanish culture, based on the telenovelas they had watched and love songs they have enjoyed.

Anxiety is an emotion language learners come to deal with, and which is related to the model proposed by Dörnyei (2005). Learners expect to be in a certain way related to their language learning experience, they believe they should be at a certain level when in fact their language learning experiences realistically allows them to be only at a certain level. The research carried out by Marcos-Llinas and Garau (2009: 94)

"investigates the effects of language anxiety on course achievement in three foreign language proficiency levels of Spanish, namely, beginner, intermediate, and advanced. […] advanced learners showed higher levels of anxiety than beginning and intermediate learners. In addition, there was an interrelation between language anxiety and course achievement. However, students with high levels of anxiety did not necessarily exhibit lower course achievement in comparison to students with low levels of language anxiety, as concluded in previous studies. Furthermore, there was a medium level of language anxiety among most participants, with no significant effect on course achievement."

The fact that the experiment indicates that advanced level learners showed higher levels of anxiety could be related to the fact that they feel the pressure and have unrealistic expectations about their experience. Once they are advanced level, they could believe that they are getting closer and closer to the ideal L2 self, which need not be. It is believed that language learners can never completely achieve the proficiency of a native speaker.

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Depending on their expectations, learners experience anxiety when it comes to passing examinations function of the domain they are going to activate in. When it comes to engineering students, they expect to be able to interact formally or informally with other persons, to read and write in the respective foreign language and in their own domain of activity, to give presentations, etc. When it comes to students in philology, the pressure is higher on them, as they find out that for anything they write and translate they will need a proofreader that is a native English speaker.

As research has shown, emotion is part of cognition. We have various emotions when we come to understand the world around us, and the experience of language learning is no exception. As we learn a language, we usually also have to interact with the teacher and with our classmates, which also generates emotions. The anxiety related to foreign language learning could also come from the interaction between teacher and students, as well as between peers. Garrett and Young (2009: 224) have studied a student's individual reactions to the language learning process and have come to the conclusion that:

"Greater attention to affect in language learning is needed because of the emotional grounding of higher order cognitive and metacognitive processes such as attention, memory, planning, and hypothesis construction (Damasio, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Affective appraisal of language learning events by individual learners often results in approach or avoidance when similar events occur in the future and influences cognitive and other lower order processes."

The language learning experience could be seen, psychologically, like any type of relationship and personal interaction. The language learning process is a communication process, where the emotional experience is never absent. The way students interact among themselves and with the teacher create an emotional atmosphere that can motivate or discourage the learners. This could be the reason why various communicative, relaxing teaching techniques have been developed where students are not interrupted to be corrected when they speak and interact for grammar mistakes.

Dewaele (2005: 377) argues that "to obtain a more complete picture of the language learner and user, we need to […] understand what makes instructed L2 learners and L2 users behave the way they do […] Communicative behavior may be influenced by cultural, social, or psychological variables which can be factored in any analysis, but it is also largely linked to unquantifiable factors such as the users' free will and random events that might affect the language learning process." Dewaele refers to the emotional experience that comes from psychological, cultural and social differences between learners, and which are factors that can influence the learning process, together with the way the relationships between teacher and student and students could work. Students can also react differently to different cultures, and especially to cultures other than their own, to which any foreign language is connected. For example, for Romanians it could be a difficult issue to accept learning Hungarian, since in Transylvanian towns there are bilingual speakers and Romanians as well as Hungarians are taught during history lessons that Transylvania belongs to them. Certain languages are connected to territorial and nationalistic disputes. These connections are emotional and can be barriers facing the efficient learning of a certain foreign language.

Pavlenko and Driagina (2007: 228) write about the way emotions can be expressed in a foreign language in comparison with someone's mother language. They underline the fact that translation is never word for word and that the morphology and syntax of a foreign language can be different from the mother language:

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"the advanced American learners of Russian who participated in the study had rich emotion vocabularies and displayed skillful uses of emotion words in all morphosyntactic categories. Many of their lexical and morphosyntactic choices approximated those of native speakers of Russian. These learners also internalized the Russian preference for emotion verbs over adjectives. They nevertheless continued experiencing difficulties in describing the emotions of others and, as a consequence, differed from the native speakers of Russian in their morphosyntactic, semantic, and register choices."

The two authors also mention the differences that remain between native speakers and advanced learners of a language. Pavlenko and Driagina propose the following course of action related to emotions vocabulary:

"We suggest that emotion vocabulary needs to be incorporated in FL instruction as a separate and important lexical and syntactic domain. In Russian language pedagogy, such incorporation means explicit metalinguistic instruction on structural and semantic differences between Russian and English emotion lexicons, and introduction of both impersonal and agentive constructions as legitimate ways of talking about emotions."

The differences between two languages regarding the expression of emotion go as far as understanding how the lexical and syntactic structure of the respective languages differ.

A study by Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008) claims that learners with a high level of emotional intelligence have proved to show a lower level of foreign language anxiety, and so did learners who were multilingual. This study proves how the language learning experience can be kept under control emotionally in certain circumstances and by certain individuals. The language learning experience could be compared with stepping into a different culture. If learners are used to this experience, and if they can keep through their personality traits, their emotions under control, the experience can be more rewarding and efficient.

Foreign language anxiety should be considered when designing activities for language learning, suggests the study done by Chen and Lee (2010). The author claim that second-language speaking anxiety should be reduced in a web-based one-to-one synchronous environment. They advise that "affective modelling (ie, considering a learner's emotional or motivational state) should also be considered while designing learning activities." (Chen and Lee 2010: 417). The outcome of the learning activities is influenced by the learner's emotions, a fact which should be considered by teachers when preparing their activities.

Hinton, Miyamoto, and Della-Chiesa (2008) resort to studies done in the field of brain research which claim that stress can negatively impact the learning experience and that emotions are central to the process of foreign language learning. The conclusions of their study relate to the fact that once we understand how the brain works and processed the experience of learning, we can design more efficient activities. The authors claim that "brain research reveals that emotion is fundamental to learning and instruction that neglects emotional dimensions of learning is likely to be ineffective." (2008: 100) The issue of emotions and foreign language learning, thus, goes deeper than the area of motivation and attracting students to learn a certain foreign language. It has to do precisely with the way we are built biologically. Our biological makeup asks for a certain approach to foreign language learning and teaching, where emotions occupy a place we cannot neglect. This becomes similar to the way psychologists need to pay attention to the emotions of their patients as a significant part of their personality.

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3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Learner-oriented teaching methods

Once we talk about teaching methods where which are centred on the learner, such as, for instance, the flipped classroom technique, we cannot ignore the aspect of emotions. We push aside the authoritarian model of the teacher simply because we realize that it is incompatible with the psychology of learners of a certain age, such as teenagers and adults. These learners prefer a more friendly learning environment where they are treated equally and not patronized. Younger learners, while being taught in a relaxed environment, also need to have some control and thus a bit of authority over them. Otherwise, the learning process would not take place as their attention would be caught by other activities, such as simple playing, having nothing to do with foreign language learning.

3.2. Communication

We live in a culture of communication, and the teaching and learning of foreign languages cannot ignore this aspect. Besides, any language is used, after all, to communicate, directly and on the spot, among interlocutors, or more indirectly such as through literature and art. This could be the reason why speaking activities are of great significance in the learning of a foreign language. It is also a known fact that some learners are not very relaxed and some are even too shy and afraid to speak for fear of making mistakes. Once we take the emotions of learners into account, we cannot ignore the problems associated with speaking activities:

"People fear talking or simply don't talk for any number of reasons, but the significance of engaging in communication in the SL cannot be overstated – regardless of the approach taken toward SLA – because use of the SL within and outside of the classroom is fundamental. Moreover, in alternative approaches to SLA in particular (see Atkinson 2011), the idea of talking to learn is at the heart of the language-learning process." (Young 2014: 377)

In any act of communication, we tend to adapt ourselves to our interlocutor so that the communication process is efficient. The same needs to happen in the language classroom, between teacher and students and among students. As we resort to the lessons we learnt in the psychology classes of the pedagogical modules, we cannot ignore the emotions of our learners.

Conclusions

A teacher of foreign languages needs to be as empathetic as a psychotherapist, to be able to place himself or herself in the shoes of the learners. This would deal with situations such as the following:

Understanding what the foreign language suggests to the learners, whether they associate it with negative or positive emotions due to cultural and historical issues;

Understanding the way the structure and vocabulary of the foreign language limits the students' capacity to express their emotions;

Understanding that the students wish to communicate in a relaxed and friendly environment and provide them with this;

Understanding in what way using a different language to express themselves helps students sympathize with a different culture and helps them adapts their personalities to the personalities of the speakers of the respective foreign language they perceive as stereotypes from their experience with novels and films.

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These are all resources that can be used efficiently and to the advantage of the learning process. Students will feel strongly motivated to continue learning once they feel positive emotions towards the foreign language and once the learning environment is a friendly and relaxed one and, at the same time, one that allows serious and organized study.

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