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Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning

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Chapter One

Introduction

This book summarizes a twelve-year research interest in what appears to be a very simple question: How is it that some people can learn a foreign language quickly and expertly while others, given the same opportunities to learn, are utter failures? Our interest has centered on this matter of individual differences in skill with foreign languages, and in order to keep as many other influences as possible under control we have so far dealt mainly with adolescents in school settings learning one of the two most prestigious languages in the world, French or English.

Quick answers to this simple question are not that convincing. For example, the notion that “it all depends on how the second language is taught” is not sufficient because some students of languages develop high-level skills relatively easily while others following the same pedagogic procedures show little or no progress. Of course it could turn out in the long run that teaching methods have to be tailor-made for each student, but such a conclusion would be extremely discouraging for teachers and school administrators, since certain students would be asked to follow audio-lingual presentations, others programmed instruction, and still others the old-fashioned grammar-translation procedures, etc.

Another quick answer is that “some people have a knack for languages, others do not,” but it is very difficult to determine just what the knack is. In fact our twelve-year study has been for us a fascinating search for that knack. From the start, we were persuaded that it would turn out to be something more than “having an ear” for languages—one of the well-entrenched myths often used to explain one’s own failures and other’s success—because, we argued, everyone learns a first language and thus everyone must have some basic ear or capacity for learning languages. And yet we were impressed with John Carroll’s (1956, 1958) work on the development of standardized measures of language-learning

apptitude. Individual differences in such an aptitude might very well account for the individual to individual variability in achievement in language study. Still we were not convinced that aptitude was the complete answer. In research where measures of aptitude were correlated with grades received in language courses, sometimes the relationship was very high, while in other situations the relationship was surprisingly low (Carroll, 1956).

One also wonders about the aptitude factor if he looks back into history a bit. When everyone had to know a second language, it seems that everyone, regardless of aptitude, learned it. Take France as an example. Many grandparents or even parents of today's generation spoke regional languages such as Basque, Breton, Provençal as home languages and learned French at school only, and apparently with no handicaps (Delaunay, 1970). Similarly, when Latin was the major literary language, educated people from all over Europe learned it as a matter of course. It shocks us to realize that Seneca, Vergil, Livy, and Cicero—those we read as models of the Latin language—learned Latin only as a second language (Mackey, 1967). It seems then that when the social setting demands it, people master a second language no matter what their aptitudes might be. What then is it to have a knack for learning a foreign language?

◀ We have approached this absorbing question not as linguists or language teachers but as behavioral scientists—in particular, social psychologists—interested in the matter of learning. When looked at from a sociopsychological perspective the process of learning a second language takes on a special significance. Over and above aptitude, one would then anticipate that a really serious student of a foreign or second language who has an open, inquisitive, and unprejudiced orientation toward the learning task might very likely find himself becoming an acculturated member of a new linguistic and cultural community as he develops a mastery of that other group's language. Advancing toward biculturalism in this manner could have various effects on different language learners. For some, the experience might be seen as enjoyable and broadening. For others, especially minority group members, it could be taken as an imposition, and learning the language would be accompanied by resentment and ill feeling. In other cases, it could be accompanied by deep-seated and vague feelings of no longer fully belonging to one's own social group nor to the new one he has come to know. At another extreme, a learner with a less democratic orientation might consider the language learning task as a means of becoming more cultured (in the superficial sense of the term) or as equipping him with a skill or tool useful for some future occupation, with little genuine regard for the people or the culture represented by the other language. In certain circumstances, the learner might be anxious to develop skill in another group's language as a means of getting on the "inside" of another cultural community in order to exploit, manipulate, or control, with personal ends only in mind. Thus, there are

various forms the language-learning process could take, at least theoretically, and if sociopsychological factors can have such varied and dramatic impact on the more serious, advanced student of languages, one wonders whether the debutant might not be similarly affected, because his attitudes, his views of foreign people and cultures, and his orientation toward the learning process might well determine or limit his progress in developing second-language competence.

A series of studies carried out by a small group of us at McGill University and the University of Western Ontario over the past twelve years has been concerned with such topics, and the findings of these investigations have gradually permitted us to construct the beginnings of a sociopsychological theory of second- or foreign-language learning. This theory, in brief, maintains that the successful learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group. The learner's ethnocentric tendencies and his attitudes toward the members of the other group are believed to determine how successful he will be, relatively, in learning the new language. His motivation to learn is thought to be determined by his attitudes toward the other group in particular and toward foreign people in general and by his orientation toward the learning task itself. The orientation is said to be *instrumental* in form if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in one's occupation. In contrast, the orientation is *integrative* if the student wishes to learn more about the other cultural community because he is interested in it in an open-minded way, to the point of eventually being accepted as a member of that other group. Variance in outlooks is recognized: some may be anxious to learn another language as a means of being accepted in another ethnolinguistic group because of dissatisfactions experienced in their own culture, while others may be as interested, in a friendly and inquisitive way, in the other culture as they are in their own. However, the more proficient one becomes in a second language, the more he may find his place in his original membership group modified since the new linguistic-cultural group is likely to become for him something more than a mere reference group. It may, in fact, become a second membership group for him. Depending upon how he makes his adjustment to the two cultures, he may experience feelings of chagrin or regret as he loses ties in one group, mixed with the fearful anticipation of entering a new and somewhat strange group. Thus feelings of social uncertainty or dissatisfaction which often characterize the immigrant and the bilingual may also, we believe, affect the serious student of a second language.)

Theories are very useful devices because they help explain complicated phenomena, such as language learning, and because in testing out implications, new and unanticipated implications are nearly always brought to light, thereby

forcing the researcher to continue probing. The theory just presented in a summarized fashion has evolved from a long run of research studies. Thus, various critical aspects of it have been tested, but only in a superficial and limited fashion. In fact, at this point in time, it is clear to us that only a start has been made, and it is hoped that much more research will follow from this start. But because this is a new look at language learning and one with potentially valuable suggestions for teachers of foreign languages and language program directors, it seems wise to present the evidence now available in some detail. With the aim of presenting that evidence, spotty as it is, and of introducing our research approaches, each of the basic studies involved will first be summarized and integrated, and then the major research referred to will be presented in its entirety as a separate *Reading* in Appendix C. We hope the whole set of readings referred to in various chapters will be useful not only to those who want to follow our arguments in detail, but also those who may want the details in order to take some of the next research steps that will become obvious as we proceed.

The first studies (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1960; placed in Appendix C as Readings Number One and Number Two) were carried out with English-speaking high school students in Montreal who were studying French. These students were examined for language-learning aptitude and verbal intelligence as well as for attitudes toward the French community and intensity of motivation to learn French. Our measure of motivational intensity was similar to Jones's (1949 and 1950) index of interest in learning a language, which he found to be important in his research with students in Wales. A factor analysis of these indices indicated that aptitude and intelligence formed a single factor or cluster which was independent of a second made up of measures of motivation, type of orientation toward language learning, and social attitudes toward French Canadians. Teachers' ratings of achievement in French were reflected equally prominently in both factors. In this case, then, French achievement was dependent upon both aptitude and intelligence as well as upon a sympathetic orientation toward the other group. It was the orientation that apparently provided a strong motivation to learn the other group's language. In the Montreal setting, students with an integrative orientation were more successful in second-language learning than those who were instrumentally oriented. In our research to date, we have not tried to measure or treat separately the manipulative orientation mentioned earlier, and we are aware that a certain amount of error in classifying students may occur until attention is given to this separate form of orientation. The recent work on Machiavellianism by Christie and Geis (1970) suggests an intriguing mode of studying this type of outlook and its possible role in foreign-language learning.

A follow-up study (Gardner, 1960; Reading Number Two) confirmed and extended these findings, using a larger sample of English Canadian students and

incorporating various measures of French achievement. In this case it was difficult to dissociate aptitude from motivational variables since they emerged in a common factor that included not only French skills, stressed in standard academic courses but also those skills developed through active use of the language in communication. Apparently in the Montreal context, the intelligent and linguistically gifted student of French is more likely to be integratively oriented, making it very likely that he could become outstanding in all aspects of French proficiency. Still in the same study, the measures of orientation and desire to learn French emerged as separate factors, independent of language aptitude, and in these instances it was evident that they alone play an important role, especially in the development of expressive skills in French. Further evidence from the intercorrelations indicated that this integrative motive was the converse of an authoritarian ideological syndrome, opening the possibility that basic personality dispositions may be involved in language-learning efficiency.

In the follow-up study, information had been gathered about the attitudes of the students' parents toward the French community. These data supported the notion that the student's orientation toward the other group is likely developed within the family. That is, students with an integrative disposition to learn French had parents who also were integrative in outlook and sympathetic to the French community. The students' orientations were not, however, simply a reflection of their parents' skill (or lack of it) in French or to the number of French acquaintances the parents had. That is, the integrative motive is not simply the result of having more experience with French at home. Rather it seems to depend on the family's attitudinal disposition.

A study by Anisfeld and Lambert (1961; Reading Number Three) extended the experimental procedure to samples of Jewish high school students who were studying Hebrew at parochial schools in Montreal. They were administered tests measuring their orientations toward learning Hebrew and their attitudes toward the Jewish culture and community as well as tests of verbal intelligence and language aptitude. Intercorrelations among these tests and measures of achievement in the Hebrew language at the end of the school year were carried out. The results indicated that both intellectual capacity and attitudinal orientation affect success in learning Hebrew. However, whereas intelligence and linguistic aptitude are relatively stable predictors of success, the importance of the attitudinal measures varies from one school district to another, depending upon the social class of the neighborhood. For example, the measure of a Jewish student's desire to become more acculturated into the Jewish tradition and culture was a sensitive indicator of progress in Hebrew for children in a particular district of Montreal, one where, in the process of adjusting to a North American gentile environment, Jews were concerned with problems of integrating into the Jewish

culture. In another district where Jews who were recent arrivals in North America lived in relatively poor circumstances, the measure of desire for Jewish acculturation did not correlate with achievement in Hebrew, whereas measures of pro-Semitic attitudes or pride in being Jewish did.

To follow up these ideas, students undergoing an intensive course in French at McGill's French Summer School were tested for changes in attitude during the six-week study period (Lambert, Gardner, Barik, and Tunstall, 1962; Reading Number Four). Most were American university students or secondary school language teachers who, in their orientations to language learning, referred themselves more to the European French than to the American French community. In this study, it became apparent that feelings of social uncertainty were markedly increased during the course of study. As students progressed to the point that they thought and even dreamed(!) in French, it was noted that their feelings of social unrest also increased. At the same time, they tried to find occasions to use English even though they had pledged to use only French for the six-week period. The pattern suggests—and this is only an hypothesis to be tested independently—that American students experience feelings of social disorganization when they concentrate on and commence to master a second language and, as a consequence, develop stratagems to control or minimize such feelings.

The final study in the original series (Peal and Lambert, 1962; Reading Number Five) compares ten-year-old monolingual and bilingual youngsters on measures of intelligence. Of relevance here is the clear pattern of results showing that bilingual children have markedly more favorable attitudes toward both language communities than do monolingual children, who definitely favor one cultural group over the other. Furthermore, the parents of bilingual children are viewed by their children as holding the same strongly sympathetic attitudes, which was not the case for the parents of monolingual children. This finding also suggests that linguistic skills in a second language, extending to the point of bilingualism, are controlled by family-shared attitudes toward the other ethnolinguistic community.

The home influence has been carefully examined in the recent study of Feenstra and Gardner (1968). They surveyed the attitudes of parents directly and included in their analysis the parental data along with a complete battery of aptitude, achievement, motivation, and attitude measures of adolescents studying French at high school in an Ontario setting. Not only did they replicate the earlier findings by demonstrating again the relation of an integrative motive to achievement in the second language, but they also showed a marked correspondence of attitudes between the two generations (cf. Gardner, Taylor, and Feenstra, 1970). Furthermore, parents with positive attitudes toward the other language community more actively encouraged their children to learn that language than did parents with less favorable attitudes.

These results appear to be consistent and reliable enough to be of general interest. Methods of language training could perhaps be strengthened by giving major consideration to the social and psychological implications of language learning. Because of the possible practical as well as theoretical significance of this approach, it seemed appropriate and necessary to test its applicability in cultural settings other than Canadian ones. The studies to follow were accordingly conducted in various regional settings in the United States, two of them also bicultural and a third more representative of "typical" urban American cities. The bicultural settings permitted an examination of attitudes working two ways: attitudinal dispositions of American students toward linguistic minority groups in their immediate environment, and attitudes of members of the cultural minority group toward the general American culture in which they function. After looking more deeply into the nature and function of attitudes, stereotypes, and value systems, and the role they play in second-language learning, we finally tested out the same set of ideas in a very complex and interesting foreign setting, that of the Philippines, where learning foreign languages plays a vital role in most students' lives.

It is to these extensions of the ideas summarized here that we will turn in the following chapters. First, though, there are preliminary discussions about research plans and about the work of others interested in the same questions as we are that will occupy us in the next chapter.