

SOCIAL FACTORS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the role of social factors in second language (L2) acquisition. In so doing it will adopt a **macrolinguistic** rather than **microlinguistic** perspective. That is, it will make no attempt to consider the stylistic factors that contribute to intraspeaker variation, but will focus exclusively on (1) how the social factors of gender, social class and ethnic identity influence L2 achievement and (2) how the settings and domains in which learning takes place also affect outcomes. As such the focus will be on inter-learner rather than intra-learner variation¹.

Social factors and learning domain do not have a direct impact on L2 learning. Rather their effect is mediated by a number of variables in particular, **learner attitudes**. This paper, therefore, will conclude with a consideration of the nature of learner attitudes. Whereas, sadly, teachers are often powerless to have much of an impact on social factors and learning setting/domain, at least in the short term, they may be able to influence learner attitudes.

SOCIAL FACTORS AND L2 ACHIEVEMENT

The 'big four' variables of macro-sociolinguistic enquiry are age, sex or gender, social class and ethnic identity². We will consider only the last three here. Although age as a social variable has received considerable attention from sociolinguistics, it has been treated primarily as a psycholinguistic variable in L2 acquisition research.

GENDER

A distinction is often made between 'sex' and 'gender'. The former constitutes a biological distinction, while the latter is a social one. A number of sociolinguists currently prefer the term 'gender' because it places the emphasis on the social construction of 'male' and 'female' (cf. Kramarae, 1990). As Labov (1991:206) notes 'there is little reason to think that sex is an appropriate category to explain linguistic behaviour' and so it is necessary to posit some intervening variable (i.e. the distinct roles assumed by the different sexes). Accordingly, the term 'gender' is preferred here.

Sociolinguistic research has identified two distinct principles relating to the linguistic differentiation of men and women (cf. Labov, 1991:206-7):

- (1) In stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women.
- (2) In the majority of linguistic changes, women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men.

Women, therefore, nearly always outstrip males in the standardness of their speech and use of prestige forms, but, also, they tend to be in the forefront of linguistic change. Women, it seems, are more sensitive to new forms and incorporate them into their speech, but, when they become aware of the change, they reject them; men are less sensitive to new forms but once they have started to use them are less likely to reject them, perhaps because they are less likely to notice them. Both principles suggest that women might be better at L2 learning than men; they are likely to be more open to L2 input and they will be more likely to rid themselves of interlanguage forms that deviate from target language norms.

These predictions based on sociolinguistic theory are borne out by several studies. Female learners do better than male. Burstall (1975), for example, investigated gender differentiation in her longitudinal study of some 6,000 children beginning L2 French at eight years old in English primary schools. She reports that the girls scored significantly higher than the boys on all tests measuring achievement in French throughout the period of the study. She also notes that low-achieving boys tended to drop French to a significantly greater extent than low-achieving girls from the age of 13 onwards. Furthermore, the girls displayed consistently more favourable attitudes towards learning French than did the boys. Spolsky (1989) also found that girls learning L2 Hebrew in Israel demonstrated more favourable attitudes to Hebrew, Israel and Israelis than boys. Boyle (1987) reports on a study of 490 (257 male and 233 female) Chinese university students in Hong Kong. The female students achieved higher overall means on every one of the ten tests of general L2 English proficiency that he administered and in many cases the differences were significant. However, the male students did perform better on two tests of listening vocabulary, lending support to previous research which shows that males are superior in this particular aspect of language proficiency.

One explanation for the females greater success in L2 learning in classroom settings may be different employment expectations. Females may perceive a foreign language as having significant vocational value for them, whereas males do not. These beliefs may derive from the students' parents. However, although this explanation is convincing for 'foreign' languages learnt in Britain, it is less clearly applicable for 'second' language learning in situations such as Hong Kong. It is possible that general differences associated with male and female 'culture' are also involved. Maltz and Borker (1983) suggest that girls are more likely to stress cooperation and that they learn to deal sensitively with relationships, whereas boys emphasise establishing and maintaining hierarchical relations and asserting their identity. The female 'culture' may lend itself more readily to dealing with the inherent threat imposed to identity by L2 learning. Another possible explanation is that females benefit from more and better input as a result of their superior listening comprehension skills. Females certainly seem sensitive to input differences; Eisenstein (1982) found that females consistently and significantly outperformed males in discriminating among different American English accents. But why, then, do males have a wider listening vocabulary? Boyle offers a number of explanations, none of which are very convincing. It may be connected with the advantage which males have been found to have in general academic development — L2 vocabulary in L2 medium education being of instrumental importance in this respect.

Gender is likely to interact with other variables in determining L2 proficiency. It will not always be the case, therefore, that females outperform males. Asian men in Britain generally attain higher levels of proficiency in L2 English than do Asian women for the simple reason that their jobs bring them

into contact with the majority English-speaking group, while women are often 'enclosed' in the home. Gender interacts with such factors as age, ethnicity and, in particular, social class.

There have been disappointingly few quantitative studies of the effects of gender on L2 proficiency particularly in majority or official language settings. Clearly this is an area where more work is needed.

SOCIAL CLASS

An individual's social class is typically determined by means of a composite measure that takes account of income, level of education and occupation. It is customary to distinguish five groups; lower class, working class, lower middle class and upper middle class.

There is evidence of a strong relationship between social class and L2 achievement. Burstall (1975;1979) found that for both boys and girls in her study of L2 French in English primary and secondary schools there was a strong correlation between the pupils' socioeconomic status and achievement. Children from middle class homes regularly outperformed those from lower and working class homes. There were also class related differences in the learners' attitudes. Working class children tended to drop French after their second year in secondary school, while middle class children were likely to continue. Olshtain, Shohamy, Kemp and Chatow (1990) investigated the levels of proficiency in L2 English reached by 196 grade 7 learners in Israel. The learners were divided into an advantaged and a disadvantaged group on the basis of socioeconomic status. Olshtain et al found that the two groups differed significantly in L1 (Hebrew) cognitive academic level proficiency (CALP)3 and that a number of measures of this correlated significantly with L2 English achievement. One interpretation of this result was that the advantaged children were better at learning English in a classroom setting because they had more developed L1 CALP. Interestingly, variance in the advantaged group was not attributable to differences in self-reported attitudes and motivation, whereas in the disadvantaged group it was, a point that will be taken up later. Overall, though, L1 CALP explained much more of the variance in L1 achievement than did motivation and attitudes. Finally, Skehan (1990) also reports moderate correlations between the family background of 23 secondary school children in Bristol and both language learning aptitude and foreign language achievement in French and German, middle class children again outperforming lower-class. Skehan suggests that these relationships may reflect the learners' underlying ability to deal with context-disembedded language, thus bearing out Olshtain et al's main conclusion.

All these studies examined L2 achievement in foreign language classrooms. Their results mirror the general finding that children from lower socioeconomic groups are less successful educationally than those from higher groups. Another study, however, suggests that the disadvantage in language learning shown by lower-status groups is not inevitable. Holobrow, Genesee and Lambert (1991) report on a study of partial immersion involving kindergarten and grade 1 pupils in Cincinnati (USA). They found no difference in either French listening comprehension or oral production in children from different socioeconomic and ethnic groups:

... the working-class and black students were able to benefit from the second language experience as much as middle-class and white students. In other words, the disadvantaged students were not disadvantaged when it came to second language learning (p194).

One possible reason for this is that the immersion programme placed greater emphasis on basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), which are not so dependent on individual differences of either a cognitive or a social nature.

Again, there have been few studies investigating social class and L2 learning. The results to date suggest that middle class children achieve higher levels of L2 proficiency and more positive attitudes than working class children when the programme emphasises formal language learning. This may be because they are better able to deal with decontextualised language. However, when the programme emphasizes communicative language skills, the social class of the learners may have less or even no effect.

ETHNIC IDENTITY

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1990;1990) inform us that 'ethnicity is a slippery concept'. This is partly because there is tension between 'objective' and 'subjective' definitions of the term. Objective definitions predominated in early anthropological studies, in which researchers imposed external categorizations on their subjects. Subjective definitions see ethnicity as a process whereby individuals use labels to define themselves in communication with others and are now generally favoured. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey point out that both self- and other categorisations of ethnic identity may influence the way language is used in inter-ethnic communication.

There is a general consensus that ethnic identity can exert a profound influence on L2 learning. This influence can take three possible forms, corresponding to a normative, socio-psychological and socio-structural view of the relationship. Representative samples of the kinds of research that each has spawned will be considered here.

Research based on a normative view of the relationship between ethnic identity and L2 learning seeks to establish to what extent membership of a particular ethnic group affects L2 achievement. A key concept here is that of the 'distance' between the cultures of the native and target languages, the idea being that the more distant the two cultures are, the more difficult L2 learning is and, therefore, the lower the achievement levels. Strevens (1987) lists a number of 'impediments' to the learning of L2 English that derive from cultural differences. He argues that learners who belong to cultures from which the purpose for which English is being taught is absent (e.g. mathematics and science in societies in Africa and South America), which do not revere logical argument, which emphasize ideology over everyday 'reality' and where personal comportment plays an important role are likely to experience greater difficulty in learning English than learners whose cultures resemble English-speaking cultures in these matters.

Svanes (1988) investigated the acquisition of L2 Norwegian by three ethnic groups in Norway. One group (the 'near' group) consisted of learners from Europe and America who shared a common 'western' culture. The second group (the 'intermediate' group) consisted of learners from the Middle East and Africa, all of whom had had contact with western culture. The third group (the 'distant' group) contained students from Asian countries (e.g. India and Vietnam). Svanes found a clear relationship between cultural distance and L2 achievement, measured by means of an examination that tested a wide variety of knowledge and skills. The Western students had the best grades, the Middle east and African students the next best and the Asians the poorest results. It should be noted,

however, that there is no way of knowing whether the difference in the grades obtained by the three groups was a reflection of cultural distance or linguistic distance.

A socio-psychological view of the relationship between ethnic identity and L2 proficiency emphasizes the role of attitudes. The attitudes that learners hold towards the learning of a particular L2 reflect the intersection of their views about their own ethnic identity and those about the target language culture. These views will influence both L2 and L1 learning, as shown in Table 1.

Lambert (1974) distinguishes **additive** and **subtractive bilingualism**. In the former learners maintain their L1, adding the L2 to their linguistic repertoire. In such cases, learners may become **balanced bilinguals**. This is likely to occur when learners have a positive view of their own ethnic identity and of the target language culture. In the latter, learners replace their L1 with the L2, failing to develop full competence in their mother tongue and, in some cases, actually losing competence that has already been acquired. This arises when learners have a low estimation of their own ethnic identity and wish to assimilate into the target language culture. When learners have negative attitudes towards both their own culture and that of the target language, **semilingualism** may result. That is, the learners may fail to develop full proficiency in either language. It should be noted, however, that **semilingualism** (so defined) is a controversial notion, as it runs the danger of depicting as deficit what is in fact only difference. It should also be noted that the native L1 language competencies of poor minority language children may be fully functional in the out-of-school contexts in which they are used (cf. Edelsky et al, 1983). **Monolingualism** (i.e. failure to acquire the L2) is associated with a strong ethnic identity and negative attitudes towards the target language culture. Of course the relationship between ethnic attitudes and the different kinds of 'lingualism' is not as absolute as shown in Table 1. It does not follow, for instance, that learners with negative attitudes towards the target language culture will invariably fail to learn the L2, as other factors (such as instrumental need) can affect the outcomes.

ATTITUDES AND L2 LEARNING

	Attitudes towards	
	Native culture	Target culture
Additive bilingualism	+	+
Subtractive bilingualism	-	+
Semilingualism	-	-
Monolingualism	+	-

Key: + = positive attitudes
 - = negative attitudes

Table 1

The role of attitudes in L2 learning has been extensively researched by Lambert and Gardner and their associates (e.g. Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1975) primarily in Canada but also in other settings (e.g. the United States and the Philippines). The theoretical framework which has informed these is the **socioeducational model**, which seeks to inter-relate four aspects of L2 learning; (1) the social and cultural milieu, (2) individual learner differences in aptitude and motivation, (3) the learning setting and (4) learning outcomes. According to this model, L2 learning is not just a question of learning new information but of 'acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community' (Gardner, 1979; 193).

A number of studies have supported Gardner and Lambert's original claim that a socially based motivation involving a 'willingness to be valued members of the (second) language community' (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; 271) results in high levels of L2 proficiency (cf. Gardner and Clement, 1990). Learners' attitudes have also been found to affect language attrition. Gardner, Lalonde and McPherson (1985) report that learners of L2 French with favourable attitudes showed little decline, while those with less favourable showed significant loss in self-rated proficiency six months after an intensive course. However, other studies suggest that the relationship between positive attitudes and L2 proficiency is less clear-cut. In some cases no significant relationship has been found and in others there have been negative correlations. For example, Oller (1977) found that Chinese students with high levels of L2 English rated Americans lower on traits such as cleverness and happiness than did those with less proficiency. Svanes in the study referred to earlier found that the Asian group, which had the lowest level of achievement, displayed the most positive attitudes towards Norwegians. In this study, too, there was a negative relationship between attitudes and language proficiency. Svanes suggests that 'for groups of adult students living in a foreign country, it is more important to have a balanced and critical attitude to the host people than to admire it uncritically' (p. 365-6). The setting is likely to affect the nature of the relationship. There is an obvious difference between Mexicans learning English in California and anglophones learning French in Canada, for example. Whereas the former may well feel their ethnic identity is under threat from the majority culture, the latter are likely to feel secure as members of the majority culture. Also, as Okamura-Bichard's (1985) study of Japanese children temporarily residing in the United States has shown, socially determined attitudes interact with learners' personal views. Okamura-Bichard argues that the 'personal translation of social factors is ... critical in motivating individual learners to make efforts in their learning attempts' (p. 85). She suggests that what she calls the 'happiness' factor can be more important than interest in or attitudes towards the target language when the learner is a young child. In the light of such observations, it is not surprising that conflicting results have been obtained.

A socio-structural view of the relationship between attitudes and L2 learning is evident in work which has examined the effect that ethnic identity has on the interactions between members of different ethnic groups. This view has been explored within the general theoretical framework of inter-personal accommodation and has been developed into a full theory of L2 acquisition, known as the **inter-group model** by Giles and Byrne (1982). According to this, members of an ingroup may or may not adopt positive linguistic distinctiveness strategies when communicating with members of an outgroup. Giles and Ryan (1982) suggest that speakers evaluate a situation and then decide whether to adopt status or solidarity and person-centred or group-centred strategies. In situations where people emphasize solidarity with their own ingroup, linguistic divergence from the outgroup is likely, whereas in situations where they are more concerned with status and are person-centred convergence

is likely. Language attitudes play an important role in this model, too, but whereas Gardner and Lambert see attitudes as affecting learning outcomes via **motivation**, Giles and his associates see them as influencing learning via the nature of the **interethnic communication** that takes place. Successful L2 learning is held to occur when learners engage in frequent and long-term convergence.

There have been no longitudinal studies of learners who tend towards divergence or convergence. Sato (1981) showed that ethnicity affects the communication styles found in ESL classroom discourse. Asian learners participated in fewer self-selected and teacher-allocated turns than did non-Asian learners. She suggests that this reflected the Asian learners reluctance to accommodate to American ways of speaking in the classroom. Sato did not investigate the effect of these different patterns of interaction on L2 learning, although she speculates that the Asians might be disadvantaged.

SUMMARY

In this section we have examined in what ways specific social factors affect L2 learning. In the case of gender, female learners outperform male learners in language classroom settings and also display more positive attitudes. Male learners do better in listening vocabulary, however. The effects of social class may depend crucially on the setting; in language classrooms that emphasize formal language learning working class children are less successful than middle class children, whereas in immersion settings they do just as well. The central factor - the one that has attracted the most attention - is ethnic identity. A normative view emphasizes the effect of 'cultural distance' on L2 learning; learners who are close to the target language culture are likely to outperform those who are more distant. A sociopsychological model emphasizes the role of attitudes. The relationship between attitudes and L2 learning is almost certainly bi-directional and dynamic and is likely to vary according to setting. In general, learners with positive attitudes towards their own ethnic identity and towards the target culture can be expected to develop a strong motivation and high levels of L2 proficiency while also maintaining their own L1. Successful L2 learning is also possible, however, in learners with non-integrative attitudes towards the target culture. Attitudes based on learners' sense of ethnic identity can also affect the nature of the interactions in which learners participate. Learners who are status and person-centred are more likely to converge on L2 norms and therefore be successful learners than those whose solidarity with their own ingroup encourages divergence.

It is clear that the relationship between these factors and L2 learning is extremely complex. The factors interact among themselves and their effect on learning depends to a large extent on the setting and domain.

SOCIAL SETTING/DOMAIN AND L2 ACHIEVEMENT

The social settings and domains of L2 acquisition are potentially infinite and certainly preclude a detailed consideration here. Discussion, therefore, will be limited to a number of macro-contexts.

A general distinction can be drawn between 'natural' and 'educational' settings⁴. The former arise in the course of the learners' contact with other speakers of the L2 in a variety of situations in the workplace, at home, through the media, at international conferences, in business meetings etc.

Educational settings are found in schools. Some learners will experience the L2 entirely in natural settings, others will have contact with it only in educational settings, while still others will be exposed to the L2 in both types of setting.

A common assumption is that natural settings lead to higher levels of L2 achievement than educational settings. Schinke-Llano (1990:216), for instance, claims that 'second' language acquisition results in native-like use of the target language, while 'foreign' language acquisition does not. There is some support for this position. D'Anglejan (1978), for instance, reports that Canadian civil servants freed from their jobs for as long as a year to improve their L2 proficiency in intensive language classes generally remained disfluent in the L2, despite a strong motivation to learn. She suggests that one reason for this was the lack of opportunities for contact with native speakers. In contrast, Vietnamese immigrants in California who were placed in occupational settings after a short training programme, proved highly successful. Other research, however, suggests that learners in natural settings do not necessarily outperform those in educational settings - even where oral proficiency is concerned. Longitudinal studies of immigrant populations (e.g. Schumann, 1978; Schmidt, 1983; Klein and Dittmar, 1979; Meisel, 1983) show that learners in natural settings often fall far short of native language proficiency. There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that learners in natural settings do not reach the same levels of grammatical competence as those who have received formal instruction (cf. Long, 1983).

The notions of 'natural' and 'educational' settings are rather gross. Of greater interest are the differences in domain found within each of these broad types of setting and the relationship between them and L2 achievement. Table 2 identifies a number of fairly distinct domains under each type, gives examples of each and considers some of the likely learning outcomes.

NATURAL DOMAINS

Following Judd (1978), three 'natural' learning domains can be identified; (1) majority language domains, which can be further subdivided into those that are 'monolingual' (such as the United Kingdom or USA for learners of L2 English) and those that are bilingual (e.g. Canada or Belgium), (2) official language domains, where the L2 functions as an official language even though most people do not speak this language as a mother tongue (e.g. the decolonized countries of Africa and Asia) and (3) international language domains, where the L2 serves as the means of interpersonal communication in countries where it is neither learnt as a mother tongue nor used as an official language (e.g. the use of English for business communication in Japan).

As it is the majority language setting that is of most interest to an audience in New Zealand, only this domain will be considered in detail here.

L2 LEARNING IN MAJORITY LANGUAGE DOMAINS

L2 learners in the first type of natural setting are typically members of ethnic minorities - immigrants or the children of immigrants (as in the United States or Britain), migrant workers (as in Germany) or their children. These learners vary enormously in the extent to which they approximate to the

language norms of the majority language. In some cases a stable 'immigrant interlanguage' (Richards, 1972) develops of the kind documented by Fishman et al (1968) for the Puerto Rican community in New Jersey, as in this example where the speaker is talking about shopping:

"No make any difference, but I like when I go because I don't have too many time for buy and the little time we buy have to go some place and I find everything there".

Such varieties reflect the social conditions in which the learners live. The Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch" (1978) refers to the 'miserable social situation' of the foreign migrant worker population in West Germany which is due 'not only to economic factors, such as insecurity of employment, low-prestige work, and so on, but also in large measure to a rather thorough exclusion from the local social and political life' (p. 2). One of the main findings of this project is that the length of residence in Germany functioned as a major explanatory factor in the workers acquisition of L2 German for only the first two years of their stay. After that, it was overridden by other social factors such as contact with Germans during leisure time, age at time of immigration, contact with Germans at work, professional training in the country of origin and number of years of formal education.

Immigrant interlanguages are not always permanent while some groups of learners develop varieties much closer to the target language (e.g. Norwegian and Swedish groups in the United States). How can this be explained? Taylor (1980) identifies three stages in the social mobility of immigrant groups. Initially there are rewards for maintaining the L1, as individuals compete for position from within the minority group. Next, rapid learning of the L2 takes place as individuals identify with the majority group and seek to improve their social status. This may lead to subtractive bilingualism. Finally, conscious attempts to maintain the L1 (the minority language) may be made as individuals react to discrimination by the majority group, which they perceive as responsible for their lack of social advancement. Learners who reach this final stage are likely to achieve **additive bilingualism**. How far different groups of learners progress will depend on the kinds of social factors identified by the Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch". These factors govern both the degree of contact that takes place between learners and target language speakers, how useful it is for an individual learner to make the effort of learning the L2 and, in some cases, the extent to which the interlanguage variety becomes a symbol of ethnic pride.

A somewhat different majority setting arises in countries like Canada and Belgium where large numbers of the indigenous population learn the language of the majority. In Canada francophones learn English as an L2, while in Belgium speakers of L1 Flemish learn L2 French. These settings are of considerable interest because they enable us to compare the differential levels of proficiency achieved by minority community members learning the language of the majority and, vice-versa, majority members learning the language of the minority. In both Canada and Belgium minority learners of the majority language tend to reach higher levels of proficiency than majority learners of the minority language. Edwards (1977) found that francophone learners of English in Ottawa maintained their English language skills, whereas anglophone learners of French tended to lose their French language skills. Edwards suggests that long term retention of linguistic and communicative competence is a function of successful prior learning, opportunity to use the skills acquired and interest in using them. The francophones reported both more opportunities for using their L2 and greater interest in doing so than the anglophones. Lambert (1974) has claimed that **subtractive bilingualism** characterizes many French Canadians learning L2 English, whereas **additive bilingualism** is more characteristic of English Canadians learning L2 French.

EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Skuttnab-kangas (1986) has usefully distinguished four broad types of educational domains; (1) segregation, where the L2 learner is educated separately from the majority or a politically powerful minority, who speak the target language as their mother tongue, (2) mother tongue maintenance or language shelter, where in a weak form learners are given classes in their mother tongue directed at ensuring formal language skills and in a strong form pupils are given a full education through the medium of their mother tongue, (3) submersion, where learners are forced to accept instruction through the medium of a foreign majority language in classes where some (often a majority) of the children are native speakers of the language and (4) immersion, where learners have chosen to learn through the medium of the L2 in classes where the majority of the children speak this language only as an L2. It is also helpful to identify a fifth domain; (5) the language classroom, where the target language is taught as a subject where the normal language of communication is some other language. As Table 2 shows, different learning outcomes are typically associated with these different educational domains.

SEGREGATION

Segregation generally produces poor results. Skuttnab-Kangas (1988) argues powerfully that the overall aim of education in this domain is the development of limited L2 proficiency - sufficient to meet the needs of the majority or powerful minority and to ensure their continued political and economic control. Segregation is likely to be characterized by inadequate educational organization and provision and by negative affective attitudes in the learners (e.g. high anxiety and low self-confidence). The only advantage is that the learners are likely to be all at the same level of development, so that input can be tailored to their level. However, as this advantage is also found in immersion domains which have none of the above disadvantages, it provides a poor rationale for this type of educational provision.

MOTHER TONGUE MAINTENANCE

Mother-tongue maintenance provides support for L2 learning in two main ways. First, ensuring that the L2 is an additional rather than a replacement language results in learners developing a positive self-identity. As Spolsky (1986:188) notes, learning an L2 is intimately tied up with one's personality and being forced to learn an L2 as a replacement for the L1 is a 'direct assault on identity'. Mother-tongue maintenance, then, is more likely to result in the positive attitudes needed for successful L2 development. Second, in accordance with Cummins' **interdependency principle**⁵, CALP developed in the L1 (and to some extent BICS as well) can be transferred to the L2. Cummins (1981) notes that whereas L2 communicative skills are typically mastered by immigrant learners in about two years, it can take from five to seven years for the same learners to approach grade norms for L2 academic skills. Studies of the Portuguese-Canadian community in Toronto (Cummins et al,1990), of Japanese immigrant children in Canada (Cummins and Nakajima,1987) and of Turkish immigrant children in Holland (Verhoeven,1991) support the importance of L1 academic skills as a basis for successful development of L2 CALP.

SUBMERSION

Submersion is associated with low academic performance as a result of the failure of many learners to develop adequate CALP. It is also associated with subtractive bilingualism.

For many learners, the disjunction between L1 use in the home and L2 use at school constitutes a painful experience, as Rodriguez' (1982) autobiography illustrates. Rodriguez was the son of a Mexican immigrant who settled in a mainly white locality of California. At school he was required to use exclusively English. At home Spanish was spoken, until his parents accepted the advice of the Catholic nun teachers at his school to speak English. Gradually, Rodriguez lost the ability to communicate in Spanish, signalling his rejection of his Spanish-Mexican identity. Although Rodriguez - unlike many other learners in his situation - was ultimately successful in developing a high level of L2 proficiency, this was achieved at considerable personal and social cost. Rodriguez himself, however, while acknowledging the discomfort he experienced at both school and home, did not question the subtractive model of bilingualism to which he was exposed.

IMMERSION

Immersion programmes for English speaking learners of L2 French in Canada have met with considerable success. Genesee (1984) and Swain and Lapkin (1985) in their respective reviews of the various programmes report that immersion students acquire normal English language proficiency and show the same or better level of general academic development as students taught through the medium of their L1. Furthermore, immersion students tend to have less rigid ethnolinguistic stereotypes of the target language community and place greater value on the importance of inter-ethnic contact. These advantages are evident in disadvantaged as well as advantaged children.

Immersion programmes also lead to a high level of L2 French proficiency, particularly with regard to discourse and strategic competence. In these aspects of proficiency some immersion learners achieve near native speaker levels (cf. Swain, 1985). However, such levels are not usually reached in grammatical competence and, in some cases, a kind of classroom pidgin can develop (cf. Hammerley, 1987). Nevertheless, there is now general agreement that immersion programmes are very effective in promoting L2 development in an educational setting.

There are many reasons for this success. One undoubtedly has to do with the fact that immersion settings ensure learners more contact with the target language than other educational settings. Also learners are likely to receive input that is tailored to their level and, therefore, comprehensible. There are also social reasons. In the case of learners such as Canadian English speakers, the learners' L1 and their ethnic identity is not threatened so it is easy for the learners to adjust to the immersion setting. Furthermore, the immersion programmes are optional and, therefore, are supported by those parents who elect to send their children to them. It should be noted that these social conditions do not apply in the case of immigrant learners assigned to a withdrawal language programme - in other words immersion and segregation constitute radically different domains.

THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

While widely diverging levels of L2 achievement can be found in the language classroom domain, depending on a whole host of variables to do with the amount of contact and the type of learning opportunities on offer, it is probably true to say that many classroom learners fail to develop much functional language ability. D'Anglejan, Painchaud and Renaud (1986), for example, provide evidence of the limited success of FSL lessons taught to groups of immigrants, commenting that 'it is both disappointing yet challenging to discover that after 900 hours of formal instruction, the vast majority of the subjects have attained proficiency levels which at best can be described as minimal' (p. 199). Nevertheless, as we have already noted, learners who receive formal instruction in language classrooms appear to reach higher levels of achievement than those who do not.

SUMMARY

In this section, we have considered the relationships between learning domain and L2 achievement. These are summarized in Table 2. While it has been possible to identify a number of typical learning outcomes associated with the different domains, it must be emphasized that the relationship between setting and outcomes is an indeterminate one, as considerable variation is evident in each setting, reflecting the interplay of different social factors.

LEARNER ATTITUDES AND THE LANGUAGE TEACHER

It is undoubtedly important for a teacher to be aware of the way in which social factors and social settings/domains affect L2 achievement. Teachers who fail to show sensitivity to these run the risk of attributing failure or success to individual students for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, most teachers are probably not in a position to guarantee their learners the social conditions that promote successful language learning. The gender, social class and ethnic identity of their learners are not easily changed, even if it were considered ethical to try to do so! Nor are teachers able to have much effect in the short term on the political and economic factors responsible for the social setting of their learners. Similarly, although it is possible for teachers to influence educational policy in the long term, many will have little choice regarding the kind of learning domain in which they have to work. These comments are not intended to suggest that teachers should accept the prevailing social conditions, but clearly there is a need to try to identify an approach that might afford some practical action in the short term.

Teachers can play an active role in bringing about favourable learning conditions through the influence they can on their learners' attitudes. As we saw in the previous sections, social factors and domains influence learning indirectly through learners' attitudes. It is at this level that teachers can strive to help their learners. Attitudes are learned, not inherited or genetically endowed and, although they tend to persist, as a result of the social conditions that are largely responsible for them, they can be modified by experience (cf. Baker, 1990).

In support of the claim that attitudes constitute the level at which intervention is most likely to be effective, let us reconsider the results of some of the studies already referred to. Olshtain et al (1990) found that variance in L2 achievement in the socially disadvantaged group of L2 Hebrew learners they studied was attributable to differences in self-reported attitudes and motivation. Okamura-Bichard

(1989) reported that what she calls 'the happiness factor' was crucially important in determining the success of young Japanese children learning L2 English in the USA. Studies of immersion domains have shown that learners' attitudes can be directly affected by the nature of their classroom learning experiences. The personal disposition of individual learners can enable them to overcome the disadvantages inherent in their social position.

As we have seen, learners may be subject to conflicting attitudes. On the one hand they may wish to learn the L2 because it is seen as a way of assimilating into the majority culture, while on the other they may wish to maintain their own L1 as a way of affirming their own identities. A good example of this kind of conflict can be seen in Irish people's attitudes towards learning Gaelic. A five year study by the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (1975) found that there was general agreement that Gaelic was necessary for ethnic and cultural integrity, but at the same time there was only lukewarm commitment to its actual use. Edwards (1984) concluded that the Irish like their Irish, but that they like it dead! It is perhaps in cases of such conflict that teachers can do most to help learners.

How can this help be provided? It is not possible to offer detailed proposals here, but the following constitute general guidelines that teachers might like to consider:

- (1) Help to raise learners' consciousness about their own attitudes to their L1, the target language and their respective cultures. This can be done by making language issues one of the topics of a syllabus.
- (2) Do everything possible to make learners believe that their L1 is important and that success in learning an L2 is not dependent on abandoning their L1.
- (3) Help learners to understand the differences between their own culture and that of the target language and to realize that the differences need not be viewed qualitatively - that is, that different cultures often achieve similar ends in different ways.
- (4) Do everything possible to stimulate and maintain the learners' personal engagement in language learning tasks. It is probably easier for teachers to influence motivation at the level of task than at the socio-cultural level.
- (5) Develop well-defined strategies for identifying individual learners who are clearly unhappy in their learning situation, for diagnosing the causes of their unhappiness and for remedying them.
- (6) Whenever possible involve the learners' parents in the educational process, helping them to understand the factors that have been shown to promote successful L2 learning.

These suggestions will need to be implemented at different levels — school policy, syllabus design and classroom methodology. They do not guarantee success, but they provide a basis for helping individual learners to manage the social factors that have been shown to influence language learning.

Notes :

1. Inter-speaker and intra-speaker variation are of course closely related, as Bell (1984) has pointed out: Variation on the style dimension within the speech of a single learner derives from and echoes the variation which exists between speakers on the social dimension (p. 151).

2. L2 acquisition researchers have considered the age factor primarily with reference to the **critical period hypothesis**, according to which L2 learners beyond a certain age are unable (or less able) to achieve native speaker competence in the L2.
3. The distinction between **cognitive academic language proficiency** and **basic interpersonal communication skills** has been made by Cummins (1984). The former consists of the linguistic knowledge and literacy skills involved in the use of language for academic work. It manifests itself in context-reduced language behaviour. The latter consists of the skills required to achieve oral fluency and sociolinguistic appropriateness.
4. The distinction between 'natural' and 'educational' settings is preferred to the more common distinction between 'second' and 'foreign' because they are less-loaded terms and less open to misunderstanding and abuse. The term 'second', for example, is disapproved of in South Africa on the grounds that it potentially disadvantages non-mother tongue learners of English or Afrikaans. Also, many learners in a 'second' language setting may in fact be more or less dependent on school for contact with the L2 and, therefore, may more closely resemble those in 'foreign' settings.
5. The **interdependency principle** (Cummins, 1991) claims that whereas BICS develops separately in the L1 and L2, CALP is common across languages. It follows, therefore, that CALP can be transferred from the L1 to the L2 and that one way of ensuring effective L2 CALP is by developing L1 CALP.

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