Fear, Dependence and Loss of Self-Esteem: Affective Barriers in Second Language Learning Among Adults

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RELC Journal 1989 20: 61
DOI: 10.1177/003368828902000206

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Y. Cohen and M. J. Norst
Macquaire University
NSW, Australia

Abstract

The authors wished to monitor the attitudes of adults required to undertake the study of a foreign language. The requirement was part of a postgraduate degree. The subjects were virtual monolingual English speakers, with one exception. They were adult professional people taking a part-time Master's degree in Migration Studies. They were required to take two semesters of a foreign language of which they had no prior knowledge.

Using the notions of affective filter, ego boundaries and ethnocentrism, the authors examined the students' diaries, which students had been requested to keep for each of thirty lessons. The diaries showed a degree of fear and anxiety at having to perform semi-publicly (before peers and teacher), which was quite unexpected in its intensity and vehemence, only partly alleviated by a caring, non-threatening teacher. Words used to describe emotional response to their situations included: embarrassment, trauma (the favourite), unnerving, frightening, resentment, frustration, anger, paranoia, victim, guilt. Physical responses included: blushing, trembling hands, pounding heart, headache, coronary (hyperbole, fortunately).

It became clear that, although there is a strong tendency for adults to respond to classroom language learning in the above manner, nevertheless the teacher's unfailing caring, support, positiveness, encouragement, kindness and patience can help to overcome anxiety *in time,* and that these attributes are actually more important than technical knowledge or skill.

The diaries also suggest that there is something fundamentally different about learning a language, compared to learning another skill or gaining other knowledge, namely, that language and self are so closely bound, if not identical, that an attack on one is an attack on the other.

Much interest has been focussed on affective factors, both as aids and as barriers to second-language learning. Particularly, the latter, broadly subsumed under the rubric "affective filter", has exercised the minds of applied linguists and teachers, who have been concerned to identify these factors with a view to reducing them, and thus enhance the efficiency with which learners might approach their goals.

The material presented here has to do with the problems of fear/anxiety, dependence and loss of self-esteem, as well as a brief excursion into ethnocentrism, experienced by individuals faced with the task of learning a new language in a classroom situation. In particular, the fears seem to be partly derived from learners' fears of the foreign and unfamiliar, but especially the fear of having what they perceive as their inadequacy exposed, resulting in loss of self-esteem, of being placed in a dependent and "inferior" position before their peers, a position in which they lose command and control of their situation. If the hypothesis of the affective filter is accepted, then what we have called "language fear" is most certainly a manifestation of this filter. The affective filter sees

> the learner's emotional states or attitudes as an adjustable filter that freely passes, impedes or blocks input necessary to acquisition. The Affective Filter Hypothesis states that acquirers with a low affective filter seek and receive more input, interact with confidence, and are more receptive to the input they receive. Anxious acquirers have a high affective filter which prevents acquisition from taking place. It is believed that the affective filter (e.g. fear or embarrassment) rises in early adolescence, and that may account for children's apparent superiority to older acquirers of a second language [1].

In any work on affect, the words of Dulay, Burt and Krashen should be borne in mind:

> In the last analysis, the precise manner in which human beings learn languages remains invisible. It takes place inside the mind of the language learner, where researchers can follow in only the most rudimentary manner[2].

Research on affect in the study of language learning has tended to focus on *attitude* and *motivation* leading in turn to the notions known as the *instrumental* and the *integrative* factors, that is, whether the primary motivation is for vocational related purposes, or other forms of advancement, success or public activity; or whether the learning of a language is predominantly inspired by the desire to integrate into an admired society/culture/language group. Burstall et al.[3] have expressed doubts about polarising these factors. Both may be at work in an individual, e.g. the case of a person emigrating to an admired culture and who wishes to be vocationally or otherwise publicly successful there. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine the business manager strongly motivated to learn the language of a country which is an important customer, while he nevertheless dislikes the culture and language of that country. The need to pass an examination imposed by an academic requirement (the situation of our study group) may be seen as instrumental, although some had integrative motivation as well.

Thus it is clearly possible to be motivated to learn the language because of one's (uncritically?) positive attitude towards the language and culture, but it is also possible to be motivated to learn the language *despite* one's negative attitude.

Introversion and extraversion are also factors which may influence second language acquisition. These concepts, associated with C.G. Jung, have been measured by H.J. Eysenck[4]. Pritchard[5] supports the notion that the good language learner is likely to be an extrovert, but on the other hand, introversion may well favour the systemic study of a language, as opposed to the performance aspects. In Richards' terms, the extrovert may develop proficiency in the pragmatic mode at the expense of the syntactic mode, while the introvert does the reverse[6].

A further concept, that of empathy, has also been used to explain proficiency or lack of it in second language acquisition. Empathy, the willingness and capacity to identify with others is allied to the integrative orientation mentioned above. Guiora has linked the concept of empathy, as it relates to second language acquisition, to the psychoanalytic interpretation of ego development. Guiora's hypothesis of a language ego parallels the Freudian notion of body ego. This latter is seen as the developmental acquisition of a body image by a child, in which the child recognises its bodily boundaries, and distinguishes itself from the world around it. The language boundary is similar, the notion being, that as general ego development proceeds, language, which is an inseparable part of ego and the concept of self, becomes defined and limited, its boundaries become firm and increasingly difficult to transcend.

> It is our contention that second language learning in all of its dimensions exerts a very specific demand with regard to self-representation. Essentially, to learn a second language is to take on a new identity [7].

Schumann elaborates:

> The notion of ego permeability may offer another explanation for successful second language acquisition which might serve to complement Guiora's ideas. Guiora suggests that ego permeability permits the language learner to partially and temporarily give up his separateness of identity from the speakers of the target language [8].

Our examination of our respondents' diaries has suggested that the intuitive appeal of Guiora's hypothesis is supported, and that ego boundaries in several of our students were firm and not very permeable. The assault on their egos, in both the Freudian and the lay sense of the word, by the demands of a new language in a classroom situation, both in a supportive and non-supportive atmosphere, was deeply distressing.

Scovel has examined the phenomenon of anxiety in second language learning. He reports that some studies have given contradictory results in attempts to correlate anxiety with measured proficiency in an isolated language skill such as pronunciation, and further, the results *within* studies have been contradictory. He suggests that to a point, anxiety can have a facilitating effect and beyond that point a debilitating effect [9].

A further aspect of anxiety which seemed to apply to our students, is the "double bind", elaborated by Bateson, quoted in Clarke. On this view, a double bind exists in situations where the individual will be punished whatever action he takes, even if the alternatives are opposed, or if he takes no action at all. He uses the example of the Zen master leading his pupil to enlightenment:

> The Zen master holds a stick over the pupil's head and says fiercely, "If you say this stick is real I will strike you with it. If you say it is not real I will strike you with it. If you say nothing I will strike you with it." [10].

The language learner in class is in an analogous situation. If he speaks he risks being publicly wrong and thus humiliated before teacher and peers. If he remains silent, when asked a question, he also risks embarrassment, gets no practice and possibly earns the disapproval of the teacher.

Ethnocentrism may also play a role as a barrier to language learning; it may be a reaction to the threat posed by another language to one's own linguistic identity. Although bilingualism is generally regarded positively, the idea of "subtractive" bilingualism vs. "additive" language learning has been proposed by Lambert [11] and by Gardner [12]. "Additive" language learning occurs when a member of a high status language group adds another language at no cost to his first, whereas for individuals whose language is under threat or is of lower status that the L2, becoming bilingual or trying to learn another language can be a subtractive process. Also, the fear ot assimilation can be accompanied by a negative motivation. We found one student in our group who seemed to suffer in this way to a high degree.

The material which follows derives from a small group of students enrolled in a Master's degree in Migration Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney, in 1983. The course was part-time over three years and admitted students who already had at least a first degree and were all adult members of the community in professional employment, and who had, or wished to have some vocational involvement with immigrant communities.

One of the requirements of the degree was that students must study a language entirely new to them. For convenience, most chose to take the language within Macquarie's own adult education program in languages. This is open to the general public on a fee-paying basis (although our group did not pay any fee). Two students commenced the study of a language

outside this program but were later taught by a member of the University's attending staff, on an individual basis. As well as attending classes, students were required to maintain a diary of their language learning experiences during the whole course, and were encouraged to be as frank as possible, both about themselves and all other aspects and persons with any impact on their learning. These diaries are the source of the material quoted below.

Some basic data about the participants:-
7 f., 2m.
Ages: 25, 35, 37, 37, 41, 45, 48, 53, 55.

Their previous language learning was largely confined to high school, which in Australia mostly meant French, and a lesser degree, Latin, until recent years. One student from the U.S.A. had a high school Spanish (all except one were Anglo-Celtic native English speakers, and of this latter group only one was educated outside Australia). In fact, all but two had taken French as an academic subject for between three and five years and five had Latin for between three and five years. Other languages taken as academic subjects were Spanish (see above), five years and German (one person), seven years. Several had attempted languages in adulthood, mostly for very short periods, some in class and some in the target language country. One student had lived in New Guinea for ten years and had acquired three of the local languages in a non-classroom environment.

Asked to assess their proficiency in any of these languages, they could choose from the categories: great fluency; with ease; average; with difficulty; hardly or not at all.

No-one marked "great fluency". Only one marked "with ease" (the student who was in New Guinea for ten years). The most heavily marked category was "hardly or not at all", marked 50% more than "with difficulty", which in turn was marked 100% more than "average".

In the following we attempt to give an overview of the diaries, which of course are lengthy and comprehensive, covering, as they do, thirty weeks of classes. The extracts we quote are therefore representative only, but are nevertheless selected with a view to indicating the tenor of the whole and linking them to the hypothesis and experimental work discussed earlier.

Broadly, it does appear that an integrative motivation is an indication of less language fear, *provided* that the classroom experiences are supportive and non-threatening. We examined two students with integrative motivation who experienced opposite kinds of classroom atmosphere.

It is beyond the scope of this study to enter into a discussion of definitions

of introversion and extraversion, or indeed into the individual psychology of the participants in our study. We can only report that in seminar sessions and social contacts our group was generally outgoing, articulate and socially competent; in fact one student actually describes herself as extrovert in her diary, although she found the prospect of public performance (in class) of a foreign language especially terrifying. Her behaviour was typical, if not universal, and leads us to speculate, that even for adults such as those in our group, professional people in command of themselves and their situation, "language fear" is a phenomenon to which insufficiently close attention has been paid. The loss of control, of self-esteem involved seems to be of a different order than in the case of other fields requiring cognitive and/or performance effort. The work on anxiety in language learning to date, is in the experimental mode, and has displayed a tendency to regard students as experimental material, rather than as individuals with something to say and the ability to say it with force and clarity.

An example of a student with an integrative motivation (he took Arabic to help him work and interact with the Arabic-speaking community in Sydney) in a supportive class shows little apparent fear and a desire to use the language in public. This was the same student who had lived in New Guinea and learned three languages for use while there. After initial doubts ("Am I going to be able to cope with this language?") he stresses the supportiveness of the teacher.

> "The approach of the lecturer puts everyone at ease and he attempts to encourage even poor attempts at pronunciation — people do not give up."

Although he expresses frustration, it is with structural matters, his memory, the need to refer back to rules constantly (a common preoccupation with all students; they frequently bemoan the absence of rule learning in the communicative approach used in classes, rules appear to give them a sense of security, perhaps harking back to earlier school experiences), the lack of opportunities to meet Arabic speakers and try himself out.

> "I miss out on being in an environment in which Arabic is spoken... in contrast to other languages I have learned."

He was eager to use the language rather than fearful of *having* to use it. If he expresses a fear, it is of uncorrected mistakes in use:

> "I miss the opportunity to practise - with correction of mistakes - for I fear an error in pronunciation or stress, unless corrected, may remain an error, and I will always have a pronounced Australian Arabic accent." (fear of *non*-integration)
> By way of contrast to a student we report on later, this student's

experience of working in a group containing an advanced speaker of the L2 is very positive:

> "Placing students in small groups to practise...enabled us to realise we were all in the same position — with the conclusion, if it came to the crunch, we would heavily depend on the most fluent among our number to get out of trouble."

This points to a further contrast with other students in the study; the sense of cooperation and mutual support expressed by this student, even when friends or acquaintances are in the class. This sense of isolation and *competition,* we hypothesise, is a partial explanation of languge fear.

Another contrast we noted in this student was his attitude to a missed class caused by illness:

> "I feel reassured that 'everyone has problems — keep working on it'. I am doing just that."

In other students, we noted expressions of guilt and anxiety, a sense of failure and a desire not to return to face the class, even when the student had done the homework and prepared the next lesson.

A student with a purely instrumental motivation (she had originally wanted to take a different L2, a language of which she had had a brief experience in the country itself, but was prevented from doing so) was subject to a most pronounced level of anxiety, despite her admiration for the teacher, whom she constantly praised in her diary. Her motivation was thus purely that of fulfilling the requirements of the course. She expressed her fear of individual performance:

> "I've always been a person who likes to be 'part of the group' in school work and university, I hate being called upon to talk in front of a group, although I am extravert by nature... I like the teacher very much, but I thought it was embarrassing to be singled out... I find it very, very embarrassing to be asked a question and not understand it or not know the answer... I panic when I think about the time I may be asked to do that. I find that sort of thing traumatic, even though the teacher and students are very supportive."

After taking part in a language game in which participants are progressively eliminated, she expresses fear and loss of self-esteem.

> "Well diary, between you and me I'm feeling pretty scared. I've always been up the top of classes and tonight I proved what a dunce I am, everyone laughed at me when I made a really dumb mistake first off in

the game..."

Her self-esteem is further lowered by competition with a friend in the same class:

> "I blushed with embarrassment every time I was asked a question and I couldn't answer one question. X got everything right and understood everything and that did nothing for my self-esteem."

When the teacher played an L2 tape in class the student

> "...had the most frightening experience in (L2)... I found it completely unnerving... When I was asked to repeat and translate I was dumb-founded and shook my head."

Ironically, she remarks that she uses the same technique as a teacher of English as a second language (playing a tape in class). She goes on to describe her physical symptoms when asked a question in L2 in class (the description is impressionistic — she is not a physiologist):

> "....my heart starts pumping really fast, and the adrenalin running. Then I feel myself start to go red... and by the end of the ordeal — for it *is* — I am totally red, my hands shake and my heart pounds... If anyone laughs at my mistake I feel really embarrassed and foolish, and the physics of my body don't return to normal for ten minutes or so... it's pure trauma for me."

Contemplating the prospect of standing before her fellow-students and speaking in L2, she remarks:

> "...if I'm ever asked to do that I'll probably have a coronary."

In view of this situation it was decided to facilitate the students's switch to the L2 she originally desired to do, and for which she expressed strong motivation in contrast to the L2 she was currently learning. The outcome was unexpected. She was so disappointed and enraged by the poor performance of the teacher of the new L2 class that she returned to the first class and admired teacher. This seemed to be the turning point and she writes:

> "I can honestly say that tonight has been the first time I have actually enjoyed the class and felt a little confident. (The teacher) praised me at the end of it and my ego did backflips."

In the following week she writes:

"I actually answered a couple of questions correctly and felt very pleased with myself. Mind you, I'm still very nervous and breathe a sigh of relief when my turn is over, but I am not experiencing that blind panic and physical trauma now when I'm asked to speak."

She attributes her changed attitude solely to the qualities of the teacher:

"I'm sure my changed attitude is a direct result of (the teacher's) winning my confidence and my absolute faith in her as a teacher."

Her realisation of the critical role played by the teacher occurred when the latter was replaced due to illness.

"I felt quite traumatised by the change in teachers, because as I realise now, I have developed a relationship with (the first teacher)... The experience which stands out as the most valuable in terms of learning (the L2) was the empathy (the teacher) developed with me."

She summaries the stations of her cross:

"The emotional pattern I've been through — anger → and resentment frustration → paranoia → more frustration → acceptance and willingness to learn → increasing eagerness and confidence in self and teacher."

The anxiety and suffering she endured can only be suggested in the diary extracts, but the chief elements are her extremely reduced control over her situation and resulting fear and loss of self-esteem:

"I think the trauma was caused by the smashing of a well-developed positive self-concept, and for me to suddenly find myself lost and like a blithering fool was a sudden and unexpected change."

The critical role of a teacher attitude is highlighted by the diary of a student with integrative motivation exposed at first, to a teacher who was unsympathetic, and who used ridicule, even physical abuse on adult students:

"Kept trying to think up excuses all day for not going to class and by 5 p.m. had a terrible headache... I didn't feel I learnt a thing... Feeling more and more this is a complete waste of time... I just don't want to go to any more lessons with (the teacher)... All I've experienced... is what it's like to be a *victim* in a language class."

Fortunately, she was able to change to a skilled, sympathetic and encouraging teacher. However, considerable damage had been done from which she was not able to easily recover:

"I still feel very silly and inadequate for not knowing (L2)."
"I can't cope and feel depressed at my own inability."
"(The teacher) is always so positive and I'm always so depressed about it."
"I still feel very embarrassed at every attempt to make a (L2) sound. I believe that (the first teacher) has seriously and adversely affected my confidence."

On her relationship with a fellow-student who has a somewhat competitive attitude:

"I don't want to be reminded of my own inadequacies... I'm not competitive. That's probably why I roller skate, rather than play tennis or squash."

By the ninth lesson with the new teacher, the student is able to write:

"I'm getting to know (the teacher) more and therefore feel more relaxed in the learning situation."

She is able to report of the next lesson, that it was the first lesson she actually enjoyed, and by the next, that although she feels her pronunciation is "appalling",

"... my attitude has changed in as much as I don't feel so self-conscious."

Nevertheless, facing a short oral test, *in camera,* but in the presence of her fellow students (the competitive, isolating aspect of public performance), she writes

"I am very nervous... The very idea of testing... traumatises me."

Finally she writes:
"What have I learnt? I think more about myself than (L2). My relationship and respect for the teacher seems paramount in facilitating my learning. I need positive encouragement, something which (the teacher) gave me and made me regain confidence in myself."

Both she and the previous student expressed a desire to continue learning the language.

Another student, unable to take the language for which she had integrative motivation (relating to an immigrant community with which she works), was obliged to take another L2 instead. Her responses to the classroom situation support the impressions already reported earlier, e.g.:

"I was embarrassed when called on."

Practising privately with a native speaker of the L2 she reports she:
"... was very inhibited about attempting to pronounce the language with him."

Another student, in the same class as the second student reported on in his study, although not subject to the same degree of terror, nevertheless repeatedly stresses similar reactions:

"... it's ridiculous for someone of my age and language background, but I am still very, very shy when it comes to speaking in front of a group of people my age or older... I'm too 'hung up' with making mistakes in public... I'm envious of people who are fluent in other languages."(self-esteem)

In a group exercise with other students she reported:
"The three fellows I interviewed were 'uptight' to the point of trembling."

This fear of the unknown in language learning seems to be common to the students:

"I feel so uncomfortable because I didn't know the numbers and I felt really worried that I would be asked for something involving numbers and I wouldn't know the answer."

Another behaviour feature we observed was the strong feeling of guilt leading to anxiety about missed classes, despite the fact that as responsible adults they were absent only due to causes such as illness, demands of work, etc.:

"I missed class this week... I'm feeling unusually uncomfortable... although I couldn't have attended... I felt guilty because I didn't understand (despite having obtained the homework and completing it)... I was relieved when class was over... I had been tense... as I had missed last week's lesson... I felt I was on tenterhooks.. It was really a groundless fear, but I was really feeling that missing one class could 'make or break' my progress... Now I'm really worried about the next lesson... There's really a feeling of guilt and complete insecurity when you have to go back to a class after missing a lesson. I'm almost tempted to miss the next lesson, but that's only putting off the agony." (c.f. the first student reported on)

The notion of *dependency* is mentioned by a student, in this case, the need to rely on written supports in L2 learning:

"... this makes me *very* dependent on everything except my own ability." (emphasis by student)

> "It frustrates me - as soon as we move away from whatever is directly linked to the exercises... I'm lost. This is really quite upsetting for me... my expectations of myself are too high... I'm disgusted with myself." (dependence, loss of self-esteem)

We now report on a student whose affective barrier appears to lie in a degree of ethnocentrism, combined with some humiliation and loss of face. He was very strongly attached to the language and culture of his native land, indeed his native city (he refers to himself as a "pure" member of this ancient city), and was obliged by circumstances to take a language to which he exhibited a considerate amount of antipathy (although he had previously commenced the study of another language, for which he had strong sympathies, but had simply ceased attending classes and so had not passed the degree requirement).

Of the second L2 to study he writes:

> "The sounds are obsessing me. How can you possibly reproduce sounds which come from the far end of your intestines? Correction. Some of them can just come from your throat.. providing you are willing to make it bleed... What a collection of cacophonous sounds."
> "Second day with this barbaric language I hate."
> "These damned drill exercises have let me suffer a remarkable degree of mental and physical stress."

He constantly refers to the teacher by an ironic honorific title in the L2 although he is aware that the teacher is not a native L2 speaker, in fact, he is a native speaker of a language of the same language group as the student's L1. On his relationship with the teacher, while not antagonistic, he regards him as a representative of the L2 and therefore suspect. He refers to the teacher as a "nice guy", yet lacking in "human contact."

> "Somehow he seems to be programmed, but nice. Today is a hot day; he sweats, but he doesn't complain. He keeps smiling, he always smiles; it is a stereo-typed smile... Professionally he gives the impression of being more systematic than other language teachers I have come across."

Clearly, while some grudging respect is evident, there is none of the rapport that other students stressed with their teachers.

It must be noted here, while on the subject of ethnocentrism, that is student's relationship with his fellow-students (all of whom were native English speakers belonging to the dominant language/culture) were fraught with severe frictions, and appear to have exacerbated his difficulties and focussed his attitudes:

"Three long years of hostility... arrogance, stupidity, narrowmindedness, presumptuousness... racialism."

External factors, such as a robbery at his home (in which the cassette recorder he used to practise the L2 was also stolen) did nothing to improve his attitude. Nevertheless, and perhaps despite himself, he begins to see light at end of the tunnel:

"Last night I studied vocabulary till very late. This morning I felt better. Yes, just a bit."(the last three words in L2)

There is a hint of evidence, that although the student was unable to develop a warm relationship with the teacher, the teacher's non-threatening and generally positive attitude, as well as the skill the student reluctantly credits the teacher with, were instrumental in the change.

"(honorific title) encouraged me to concentrate my efforts on vocabulary. I am doing this."
"During drill time — an endless one — today, I didn't feel cut off... on the contrary! This is the first time, I think. Have I been lucky? Or is this a real improvement? I don't know. Even more, it is nice to feel relaxed and comfortable."
"I am still up and above. What is happening to me? Even the lecturer over the last few days appears to be pleased with me (absence of ironic honorific title)."
"I am still a bit tense in classes overall, today has been another 'good' day."

Despite the student in his final remarks describing this particular language learning experience as "nasty", he insists that he does not regret "having gone back to school, as a disciple, with modesty". He himself concludes that his complete lack of motivation for learning this particular language was the reason for his antipathy towards it. He contrasts this with his positive attitude towards the first L2 he commenced learning with this program, an L2 closely related to his own. A close examination of his diary reveals however a deep antipathy to the L2 he was obliged to do, which was related to unfortunate encounters with the users of that language in his youth. Moreover, despite his professed motivational interest in the earlier L2, he did in fact abandon it after very few lessons. Finally his strong feelings about his fellow students were based on his belief in their hostility towards him (not together without foundation). They, of course, represented the dominant culture, and he felt that they were responsible for his being forced to take the disliked L2.

"Why am I here?... somebody will be happy to know I have been penalised."

He writes of "overt hostility and racialism" and attributes his difficulties to the fact that he is "not an Anglo-Saxon". It becomes clear that his difficulties in confronting the L2 have a great deal to do with his (apparently well-founded) antipathy towards the speakers of that language, of the position he found himself in due, in his view, to the representatives of *another* group of language speakers (English speakers representing the dominant culture), and his strong alliance to his own native culture and language, which he saw under threat from these two sources.

We have attempted to report on specific aspects of the affective filter, in L2 learning; 'language fear', loss of self-esteem, instrumental vs. integrative motivation and enthnocentrism. We are aware of the substantial research on affect, and grateful to it. However, it seemed to us that the traditional experimental, controlled methodology, while essential, nevertheless needed to be supplemented by something more, namely, the direct, real and painful experiences of individuals, related in their own words. Diary studies have gained ground as a qualitative investigative method in recent years, as Bailey and Ochsner have shown [13].

Our own approach has been influenced by Rivers [14], Stern [15] and Cohen and Hosenfeld [16] i.a.

Rivers, a language researcher and teacher of long standing, kept a diary while learning her *sixth* language. She discovered, among other things, that interference came not from her first language (English), but from her fourth fluent language (German), and was even told she had a German accent in Spanish!

> Stern (p. 289), looking at introspective approaches to discovery writes:
> "In explaining this area (psychological approaches in language learning) it is useful to begin with introspection, retrospection and observation and to think about ourselves as language learners and our... students in that role."

Stern asks us to recollect how we tackled language learning, whether it was easy or hard, were we successful or unsuccessful, whether our view of language learning changed, how we explained our learning experiences, and what we learned from them about language learning.

> "In a similar way we can attempt to observe language learning among our students and ask why some are successful and others seem to struggle rather helplessly."

Cohen and Hosenfeld distinguish between "introspection" (immediate inspection of mental state), "retrospection" (recollection after the event) and "delayed retrospection" (anything from several hours up to a week after the event — we have relied on delayed retrospection in our study). (p. 286).

Cohen and Hosenfeld suggest that rigorous self-observation can be a useful tool in understanding how a second language is learned and how insights gained can be used to help improve second language learning. They conclude that a combination of empirical and mentalistic approaches may provide a more complete picture of what it means to learn a language. While experimental work has identified problems, it usually leaves us unaware of how that problem manifests itself in an individual. Thus, while experiment has made us aware of anxiety in language learning, we hope our approach has exposed just *how* terrifying, humiliating and painful trying to learn a language can be. This of course lead to the question of what to do about it. Clearly, individual personality traits make universal panaceas dubious, but equally clearly, techniques, methods and approaches which deal directly with students as sensitive individuals, and take account of fear, humiliation and loss of self-esteem are central to language teaching and learning.

Lozanov's Suggestopedia and Curran's Counselling Learning approach are genuine attempts to meet this problem. They, of course, require institutional leadership and specially trained stuff. Our own observations, both from the above, and from a survey we conducted of adult language teaching institutions in Sydney[17] had led us to the view that a critical factor, if not *the* factor, is the warmth, friendliness, empathy and personal commitment of the teacher to the students as people rather than as pupils. This was repeatedly stressed by our subjects. In our earlier survey, we found that such personal qualities of the teacher were ranked first, above professional skill and knowledge of L2. Typical of the responses of the present group were

> "The experience which stands out, as most valuable in terms of learning (L2) was the empathy (the teacher) developed with me... Many times I became despondent, but she always came to the rescue with... an understanding smile which made me want to reward her by achieving."
>
> "She is quite amazing. No matter the hour or the response, she is always supportive and encouraging. She corrects in a manner that is always pleasant and supportive... often I feel she is the only one who keeps the class going... it's almost a pleasant social evening coming to class."
>
> "She told me I was making good progress, so I was feeling really positive."
>
> "She is so lively and enthusiastic."
>
> "She is a very animated, dramatic teacher - very supportive and not at all threatening."

The importance of this aspect of teaching/learning a language can be gauged by the fact that even those who felt that they had been forced to take

the language and therefore lacked any integrative motivation, were able to accept and even enjoy their language experience.

The diaries do suggest, however, that there is something fundamentally different about the performance aspect of language learning, and the fear it engenders, compared to other knowledge + skill-based subjects. We hypothesise that language and self/identity are so closely bound, if indeed they are not one and the same thing, that a perceived attack on one is an attack on the other.

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