

CHAPTER V

DIRECTING LEARNER'S POTENTIAL

V.i. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study attempts to measure and describe the degree of motivation and favourability of attitudes. The study also aims at measuring the frequency of learning strategies, and self-rating in communicative competence. The relationships between these multifaceted variables are also investigated. The relationships are examined with respect to student's age, field of study, and length of stay in India.

The major finding of the study indicates that; the entire sample possesses high degrees of integrative and instrumental motivation, and high degrees of motivational intensity. They also hold favourable attitudes towards learning the English language, and towards the Indian variety of English and its speakers. Attitudes toward native the speakers of English are found very low, ranging from neutral to unfavourable. Learning strategies, on the other hand are used very frequently by all students.

The significant relationships found in the present study consolidate Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. In this model, experiences of language learning affect motivation, cultural values and belief. These variables affect future experiences of language learning in a dynamic continuum. In the context of the present study, it might be fair to argue that the high frequency of strategy use can be considered an integral part of Gardner's model. Hence, devising and using learning strategies is in itself a language learning experience in which the language learner plays the major role of learning the language his own way.

Academic and social survival of the Arab students in India is dependent on their communicative abilities. High degree of motivation and positive attitudes found in the present study might be the outcome of what I may term as "need to integrate". Student may be aware that this activity can yield good results in improving communicative competence. This need does not surpass the instrumental reasons for learning the English language. Students could very well carry on successfully with their studies without having to integrate in the host environment. Similarly, student's integration might be for instrumental intentions; students could have integrated with the host community out of a conscious desire to learn the language, as well as, out of interest in the host culture and its members.

Littlewood (1989) stresses the importance of the students outwardness to the environment of language learning. For him, social interaction is a valuable source for language learning. Littlewood proposes a causal sequence for increasing social language learning opportunities:

Extroversion --> Social Interaction --> Progress in Learning.

In this sequence the language learner is the main player who carries the responsibility for his/her own learning. The learner being autonomous is the core principle of the research and theories of learning strategies. The present study is a first step attempt towards exploring and understanding some of the variables that may be influential for the Arab students learning English in the Indian ESL environment in particular, and for 2L learners in general.

It is encouraging to find the fresh students holding positive attitudes and highly motivated towards learning the English language. Students come to India to study and with a strong conviction to learn the English language. They are inclined towards the host community and are willing to integrate and use all means available to learn the language they come to encounter. However, further research is required to study how successful these students are in their endeavours to attain the different language competencies.

In the next section ways are suggested for utilising the findings of the present study to guide the Arab students to channelise and direct the potential they have for better language attainment.

V.ii. DIRECTING LEARNER'S POTENTIAL

Earlier research provides ample evidence that emphasises the influence of attitudinal and motivational variables in language learning. These variables are affected by many internal and external factors such as belief, ideology, environment, culture, learning situation, etc. The definitions of attitudes in psychology and education indicate that they are acquired behaviours. Acquisition, however, can be biased by unhappy experience and misperception of the attitude's object. In a similar manner they can be favourable but misdirected or improperly used which can lead to negative results, especially in learning a language.

A student with favourable attitudes and strong motivation may not be able to approach language learning in an effective way, especially when a large proportion of the input is learnt through informal learning. Satisfaction of needs sustains the attitudes and motivation of the learner.

their effect on the learning of languages. Teachers have always been the main source of input in language teaching no matter what teaching methodology is being followed. Students learning a foreign language at school most likely do not perceive a direct or even indirect communicative need for that language. Therefore, teacher's involvement in promoting positive attitudes towards the English language could enhance language learning. Teacher could also create an awareness of the importance and status of the English language as an international medium of communication.

V.iii. LEARNING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

Research thrust in the area of learning strategies, focuses on devising methods and procedures for identifying language learning strategies. A few of these studies attempt to devise and develop methods for instruction on the use of learning strategies. This is perhaps, due to the fact that this development is actually a fundamental shift in the language teaching / learning paradigm.

When looked at from a social psychological perspective learning strategy use is determined by motivation. Social psychological influences are implicated in a model of strategy use proposed by MacIntyre (1994) (see p.67 for model). In this model motivation is an important component. Students must have sufficient motivation to use the strategy and not have sufficient apprehension

about its use, several other factors are also involved including attitudes toward the learning situation, desire to learn the language, attitude toward the other group. Strategy choice and application, according to MacIntyre, is initiated by the demands of the situation and the needs of the learner.

The findings of the present study seem to satisfy the requirements included in MacIntyre's model. Present finding reveal positive attitudes towards learning the English language, towards the Indian variety of English and its speakers. The strong relationships of the social psychological variables with the frequency of strategy use can be looked at from the perspective of cause and effect. This chain reaction can be further investigated to gauge the amount and direction of the effects exerted by the social psychological variables. Further research is also recommended to evaluate the effect of these variables on actual language input and performance in communication.

The high frequency of learning strategy use found in the present study supports Denanserou's (1979) view that, learning strategies are basically devised by the learner himself. It also indicates that these strategies are the result of conscious choices made by the learners. This argument can be considered in the light of the fact that, the present sample did not receive any kind of

instruction on the use of learning strategies, neither from the researcher nor from any other source.

Prior to strategy application, basic learner awareness of learning strategies is necessary (Oxford and Nyikos 1993). These are: (1) awareness of ones own strategy (2) awareness of the wide range of alternative strategies that might be helpful (3) awareness of the circumstances under which a particular strategy can be used. These three conditions are necessary for the successful use of learning strategies. It is not to suggest that learning strategies are not used without these conditions, however, success in such cases is questionable.

Considering the frequency of learning strategy use in terms of the strong relations with the other variables, it can be understood that students use learning strategies for dual purpose. First, for establishing affiliation and rapport with the host culture and its people. Second, for enhancing their autonomous self- devised language learning. The definition of learning strategies as steps taken to facilitate learning does not rule out the possibility of using the same strategies for establishing social relations with the host community. Such possibility will help in rooting the already established social psychological variables. The majority of the identified learning strategies are communication oriented, and aim at capturing opportunities for language interaction.

Achievement might have an effect on the use of learning strategies. Success is the best motivator. Therefore, success in using a particular strategy that gives good results might as well increase the degree of motivation positively. Hence, success determines the choice of maintaining a particular strategy, or the choice of continuing to learn the target language in the first place.

Learning strategies are used by successful and unsuccessful language learners (Vann and Abraham 1990). The present research is carried out on the basis of the learning strategies identified by earlier research. It might be useful to study the contribution of Arab language learners to the existing inventory of language strategies. Further research may help identify new categories of learning strategies. Other language skills could also be considered, such as written input / output, revision strategies in relation to the present sample.

V.iv. TEACHER'S INVOLVEMENT

Prior to any instructions on learning strategy use, it must be understood that all students, no matter what their degree of success in language learning is, have some control over their learning effort. The main differentiation between successful and unsuccessful students is in the way in which strategies are used and the great

range of different types of strategies used by successful students. Teachers can profit from the students' awareness and use of learning strategies to show them how to develop new and potentially more effective strategies and broaden the use of the strategies already in place.

Based on the instructional sequence suggested by O'Malley and Chamot (1987), and Chamot (1989), a learning strategy instructional framework might include the following steps:

1. Identifying current strategies: Students develop metacognitive awareness as they describe their own thinking processes and discover those of their classmates. As students discuss their learning strategies with their peers, they discover new strategies and new applications of familiar strategies.
2. Assessing students' strategy needs. Once students current learning strategies have been identified, teachers will have to decide which additional strategies should be taught and which of the strategies currently used can be expanded and refined. Some cognitive learning strategies operate in second language contexts, such as translation, repetition, linguistic transfer. All students can benefit from using strategies such as, self-monitoring for comprehension, elaboration of prior knowledge and making inferences.

3. Planning strategy instruction. Having decided on the strategy needs of a group of students, the teacher must then plan which strategies to teach, how to initially present the strategies, the types of practice opportunities to give students, and the follow-up activities that help internalize the new strategies. In order to conduct this planning, the teacher needs to consider student strategy needs in conjunction with the general course objectives and specific demands of the learning tasks students are asked to perform.

The language teacher can assess student needs for strategy instruction by analyzing the strategies currently being used. The present findings of the research in 2L brings to focus the fact that learner variables, such as attitudes, motivation, and learning strategies, have a great potential in enhancing language learning in formal / informal settings. Active student involvement in the strategy identification process can facilitate motivation and enhance understanding of their cognitive process. Learners' own insight can make a significant contribution towards effective development instructional strategies.

V.v. CONCLUSION

Awareness of the student's attitudes, motivation and use of learning strategies will certainly help language teachers and instructors to understand the differences in the level of success of their students. The present study aim at measuring the degree of these variables, and the strength of relationships in terms of the student's age, field of study and length of stay in India. Findings show that students to be enjoying positive degrees of the social psychological variables of attitudes and motivation. Similar results are also found regarding the high frequency of strategy use in which seventy percent and above of the strategy are used very frequently by all Cases of the sample. The social psychological variables of attitudes and motivation are found to act in a continuum with the frequency of learning strategy use. The possibility remains that the direction of this continuum works both ways. Fruitful use of learning strategies may lead to positive attitudes and high motivation, or positive attitudes and high motivation may lead to high frequency of strategy use.

The language learning strategies students select and put into use are not just a question of individual preferences or learning style characteristics. The results described in the present study suggest that the ways learners choose to approach learning are related, at least in part, to the students' internal perception of the

language they are learning, the people who speak the language, and the purpose for learning the language.

The intention of the learning strategy identification research, which guides the present study, is to discover the strategies of the most effective language learners, and how these strategies can be taught to less effective language learners. Another aim is to study the variables that can contribute the most to strategy choice and use, so that strategy instructional material can be expected to increase the ability of all students to acquire the complex cognitive skill of learning a new language, and to help students become more self-confident and more motivated to learn to use a language for its intended purpose : communication.