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Language Attitude and Sex/Parent/Socio Economic Status Relationship

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ÖZET

İkinci bir dil öğrenmek hem sosyal hem de psikolojik bir olgudur. Bu sebepten dolayı ikinci dilin hangi şartlar altında öğrenildiği dikkatlice incelenmelidir. Dile karşı tutum da dil öğrenimin de çok önemlidir. Cinsiyet, ailenin tutum, görüş ve eğitim seviyesi ile kişinin bulunduğu çevrenin sosyo-ekonomik düzeyi dil öğrenirken geliştirilen tutumlar üzerinde çok önemli bir etkiye sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İkinci dil, tutum, cinsiyet; aile,sosyo ekonomik düzey.

ABSTRACT

Learning a second language is a social and psychological phenomenon which is important to consider the conditions under which it takes place carefully. Attitudes are crucial in learning a second language. Sex, parents and socio-economic status have influential effects on second language leaming.

Key Words: Second language, attitude, sex, parents, socio-economic status.

1. INTRODUCTION

Second language study is not seen as purely an educational matter any more, rather it is seen at the center of social psychology. The domain of social psychology has attracted much attention from people who are interested

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in explaining people's attitudes, emotion and motivation within a specific context and in the past decades has extended to the area of froeign language learning. It is recognised that second language (L2) learning is a social and psychological phemonenon, and it is important to consider carefully the conditions under which it takes place.

Attitude and personality variables have been found directly relevant to the study of languages for years (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1960; Anisfield and Lambert, 1961). Other authors such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) see learning, particularly the learning of a foreign language as an emotional experience, and believe that the feelings that the learning process evokes a crucial bearing on the success or failure of the learner. They emphasize the importance of the affective factor in language learning by reminding that learners are also people with likes, dislikes, fears, weaknesses and prejudices.

A review of literature reveals that many factors are related to the learning of second language. Learning a second language not only depends on the instruction given and the amount of studying done by the students but also on students' attitudes toward the language. In 1981 Krashen stated that: "Attitudinal factors that relate to L2 acquisition will be those that perform one or both of two functions. First, they will be factors that encourage intake... Second attitudinal factors relating to acquisition will be those that enable the performer to utilize the language heard for acquisition" (p. 21).

In the last two decades there has been considerable interest directed to the relationship between students' attitudes toward the subject being taught and their performance in that subject. According to Oxford & Nyicos (1989) students' attitudes toward a subject infulence their achievement.

In 1994 Gruneberg and Sykes carried out a study to investigate the relation between reading achievement and students' attitudes toward reading. In the study they used attitude questionnaire to get the students' opinions and at the end they compared the results with standardised test scores. They found that there was a relationship between achievement in reading and students' attitudes toward reading.

Moreover in 1972 Gardner and Lambert and in 1977 Clement, Gardner and Smythe found positive relationship between attitude and performance. In these studies the subjects performed better when they had positive attitudes toward the language and they were highly motivated. In 1976, Krzyzynski investigated whether there is a positive relationship between motivation, attitude and the results obtained in learning Engilsh. To accomplish this task, he presented questionnaires and interviews to secondary school classes in Konin, Poland in the 1973-74 school year. There were two questionnaires. One was used in September 1973 to students and parents and

the other was used in March 1974 only to the students. The interviews were conducted only with the students. Finally, Krzyzynski proved that there is no positive relation between motivation, attitude and the results achieved in learning English.

In 1985 Gardner, argued that learners with positive attitudes learn the language faster and retain it for a longer time. A study conducted by Morello (1988) indicated that a student who thought that learning a language was worthwhile experience demonstrated superior performance in the language. Positive attitude toward second language is also related to goal settings. Students are said to have positive attitudes when they are aware of the difficulty of the task and the goal which they are trying to accomplish. When they have accomplished a difficult task they feel self confident. This was the result of Chambers' (1994) study. The study concluded that students need to feel that they are progressing in order to have positive attitudes toward the subject matter.

Attitudes toward the subject matter also depend on the number of years the students spend studying it. It seems that students who are asked to take similar courses for several years show a negative change in their attitudes. The study carried out by Morello (1988) stated that senior students had negative attitudes toward French whereas freshman students have relatively positive attitudes. He also demonstrated that students who were placed in specific levels according to the results of standardised tests showed more positive attitudes toward Fernch. Giving students a sense of having progressed also creates positive attitudes. In 1988 Morello investigated the attitude progress relation. He concluded that students who made progress showed positive attitudes towards French but those who did not make progress showed negative attitude.

In short, positive attitudes seem to be related to a number of interrerelated factors. These include setting goals, making the task worthwhile in the eyes of the students, creating an enjoyable environment and providing a large variety of exercises. Attitude and personality variables have since long been found directly relevant to the study of languages (Gardner& Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1960; Anisfield & Lambert, 1961).

2. LANGUAGE ATTITUDE AND GENDER

There have been a lot of written studies in recent years about gender related differences in abilities. Boys have been found to have higher scores than girls on spatial and quantitative reasoning tests whereas girls tend to score higher on verbal tests (Filmer-Sankey, 1991). Gender of the students makes a significant difference in learning a second language or foreign

language. According to many studies females in general have a more positive attitude than males toward language.

Students' attitudes toward the learning of a foreign language were investigated in several studies (e.g. Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves, 1977; Eardly, 1984). The general findings of these studies were that boys are less favourably disposed toward foreign language learning than girls. In a Longitudinal study of French Education in England and Wales Burstall et. all (1974) reported that girls were more motivated and they held more positive attitudes toward the study of French and achieved higher test scores.

Horner (1970) indicated that the greatest differences between the sexes en favour of girls were in their attitudes toward the importance of the foreign Language. An 1987, Ho investigated gender differences in proficiency of English among university students in Hong Kong. He reported female superiority.

Gender differences in the use of language learning, strategies with females using strategies significantly more often than males were found by Ehrmen and Oxford in 1989 in four areas: general study strategies functional practice strategies, strategies for searching for communicating meaning and self management strategies. In 1989, Oxford and Nyikos found similar results in a study of 1200 university students.

Throughout the world, the language learning studies which have examined gender have found that females frequently use more strategies than males to learn languages in a variety of strategy categories and males do not signif to use significantly more than females in any strategy category. In a study involving language proficiency, Wen and, Johnson (1991) learned that Chinese females learning English were more proficient than their male counterparts.

In 1992, the role of gender in language learning was examined through self reports concerning males' and females' attitudes, beliefs, strategies, and experiences in language learning. A questionnaire with 11 previously confirmed factors was given to the 138 first year Spanish students. The analysis showed that females reported a higher level of motivation and strategy use in language learning (Bacon, Sucam Mc and Finnemann).

In 1993 the role of gender in second language learning achievement, motivation and attitude were investigated by Djigunoviç. She used 10 measures to examine the variables and her sample was 340 students from Zagrep primary and secondary schools who were learning English as a second language. Grades in English, practical motivation that is use of English, affective motivation which is whether the learner like the language or not, integration into the target Language and culture and teaching setting as a motivator, learning differences as a demotivator, evaluation of English course,

difficulty of English course, utility of English course and interest were the 10 measures. At the end, it was found that learning achievement, attitude and motivation clearly differentiated male and female learners whereas measure of demotivation and course utility difficulty showed correlations between gender and age. As a conclusion, it was stated that the most differences between female and male learners vary across age.

In 1986, Batters conducted a project on student and teacher attitude about modern languages. She conducted the study with 950 students of French, German, Italian and Spanish in the 2nd through 4th years of language study. Responses to a questionnaire on perception of gender differences in the Language classroom, attlitude toward spoken language in the classroom and participation in spoken language in the classroom were reported. The results were like that: The majority of both boys and girls percieved no gender differences in terms of which sex learns foreign language better. Over 90% of both sexes did not perceive any gender differences regarding the importance of learning in a foreign Language. Although boys were more negative than girls in many attitudes, their attitude concerning spoken language were similar to those of girls. The girls spent a great amount of time than boys on attentive activities, while boys spend slightly more time on participatory activities. On the whole, boys reject the notion that language is "girl talk". Students of both sexes feel that language is "teacher talk" and consequently adopt a passive rather than an active attitude in the classroom.

3. LANGUAGE ATTITUDE AND PARENT

The relationship between parents' and children's attitudes suggests that attitudes toward foreign language are developed in the home before language training starts. To support the view Gardner (1960) gathered information about the attitudes of the students' parents toward the French community. These data supported the notion that the students' orientation toward the second language is likely developed within the family. That is, students with an integrative disposition to learn French had parents who also were integrative in outlook and sympathetic to the French community.

The home influence has been carefully examined in the study of Zamir in 1981. They surveyed the attitudes of parents directly and included in their analysis the parental data along with the complete battery of aptitude, achievement, motivation and attitude measures of students studying French at high school in Ontario. They found that the parents with positive attitudes and have strongly sympathetic attitudes toward second language more actively encouraged their children to learn that language than did parents with less favourable attitudes.

Different life styles came to light, some of which were productive and valuable in the young person's development while others were disruptive and restrictive. One sub group of students who had everything, advantaged background and parents who care and encourage excelled in language learning. But another type of students presented a very disturbing picture. These young peel came from less privileged homes did not excel in any academic working including second language learning apparently because they lacked the parental encouragement need for success and motivation (Gardner, 1968).

In 1972 Gardner & Lambert stated that personal motivation derived from a home atmosphere where parents encouraged and in turn were encouraged by their children's progress in learning the language affect the attitude of parents and learners on foreign language.

It was found that Philipino students who approach the study of English with an instrumental orientation and who receive parental support for this outlook were clearly successful in developing proficiency in the language (Lambert & Klineberg, 1967).

As Smith cited in 1971, the parent who has had an unfavourable experience with foreign language study is not likey to recommend it highly to his children. On the other hand, the parent who has had very successful experiences or is bilingual maybe so overzealous about foreign language study for his child that he drives him away from it. The student who grows up in a neighbourhood where there are fictions between ethnic groups or in a family where prejudice against certain ethnic groups exist will not emerge from this atmosphere untouched.

In his study, Jan Zamir investigated about the relation between attitude and sex and attitude and parental background toward second language (1981). As a result sex was found to be a significant factor in choice of studying foreign language as well as in the particular language choose more females choose French and Spanish and more females choose German. An the study, Zamir made a survey concerning language attitude toward the foreign language commonly taught in the USA, French, German, Spanish and Latin. The students were 621 high and junior high school students. Along with the language attitude data, the guestionnaire obtained information about grades in language course, parents' language background, parental educational level, students' prior knowledge of foreign language. Overall attitudes reflected a feeling that foreign language were studied be use of educational or parental requirements rather than personal choice on the part students.

On the other hand, in his study Obanya (1976) investigated the effects of lack ot interest, poor teaching, laziness, lack of aptitude, influence of

parents etc on language attitudes. He found out that influence of parents were felt to be relatively unimportant by students.

4. LANGUAGE ATTITUDE AND SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS

Fred Genesee (1976) stated in his article that intelligence is not necessarily the only or the most important predictor of second language achievement. Are said that economically disadvantaged students had similar listening and speaking skills to socially advantaged students.

On the other hand Wright claimed that "foreign language study is seen as an activity of the wealthy and of females...successful language diversification through immigration and the openeng of the EEC is changing many previous attitudes toward foreign language learning" (1993: 54).

During 1963, arrangements were made by Ministry of Education for a national experiment in foreign language teaching to be carried out in selected primary schools in England and Wales. The study's main aims were to examine the effect of certain pupil variables such as age, sex, socio-economic status, perception of parental encouragement, employment, expectations, etc. on level of achievement in French and attitude toward the foreign language learning. It was found that, fother things being egual, the older children tended to learn French more eficiently than the younger ones. Also throughout the period of the experiment, the girls in the experimental sample scored significantly higher than the boys on all tests measuring achievement in French and finally there was a linear relatlonship between a student's socio-economic status and his level of achievement in French. (Burstall: 1977)

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