Conceptos clave de la lingüística aplicada /
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AFFECT IN L2 LEARNING AND TEACHING

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The term *affect* refers essentially to the area of emotions, feelings, beliefs, moods and attitudes, which greatly influences our behavior. Oatley and Jenkins (1996:122) maintain that "emotions are not extras. They are the very center of human mental life [...]." A useful starting point for conceptualizing affect in the area of non-native language (L2) learning is Earl Stevick's (1980:4) affirmation that "Success [in language learning] depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom." What goes on *inside* people refers to individual factors such as self-esteem, anxiety, inhibition, willingness to take risks, learning styles, self-efficacy, and motivation. What goes on *between* people, the relational aspects, has to do with classroom transactions, where an attitude of facilitation and a concern with group dynamics are extremely important (Arnold and Brown 1999).

Speaking of the affective side of language learning, Scovel (2000) notes that emotions might well be the factor that most influences language learning, and yet he points out that affective variables are the least understood by researchers in SLA. In part this may be because research in the field is often of a quantitative nature, and affective aspects of language

learning may not always be easy to deal with in a quantitative research frame.

Affective learning is sometimes contrasted with cognitive learning as if the two were totally separate. Yet, research shows this is not true. Reviewing studies on the relationship between affect and cognition, Forgas (2008) emphasizes the key role played by affect in how we create mental representations about the world and retain them in memory, and how we process information. According to Bless & Fiedler (2006), empirical evidence shows that affect has a direct influence on cognition, on how people think; and neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux (1996:25) goes so far as to claim that "minds without emotions are not really minds at all." From his work on the brain and second language acquisition, Schumann (1994) affirms that neurologically speaking, affect is part of cognition. One reason for this is that an affectively positive environment puts the brain in the optimal state for learning: minimal stress and maximum engagement with the material to be learned. As Chomsky (1988) said, about 99% of teaching has to do with getting students interested in the material.

Recognition of the importance of affective factors for language learning/teaching is not radically new. In fact, in the fifth century St. Augustine wrote about his unpleasant experiences as a child learning Greek as a foreign language, and he argued that curiosity and interest, rather than pressure and fear, is what leads to successful learning. Much more recently, in the 1970s Suggestopedia, Silent Way, Community Language Learning (sometimes been referred to as the affective-humanistic language teaching methods) along with Total Physical Response all took into account the role of affect in language learning. The current concept of learner-centered teaching also connects with a concern for affect in the classroom, as does Krashen's metaphor of the affective filter.

Today, however, interest in affect has taken on even greater importance for language teaching practice. For example, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages includes among the competences involved in language learning the *Existential competence* (savoir-être), which is basically composed of elements of the affective domain. According to the Framework (5.1.3), it significantly influences

language learners and users both in their communicative acts and their ability to learn.

Similarly, new research in the affective domain continues to shed light on the acquisition process. For example, Dörnyei (2009) has developed the theoretical framework for the L2 motivational self system which takes SLA motivation conceptualizations beyond the traditional integrative vs. instrumental approach and has generated important empirical research as well as implications for the classroom, including for teacher motivation and teacher development (Kubanyiova 2009). Also, the research group "The affective domain in learning English", funded by the Andalusian Education Department, has undertaken various joint projects related to affect, such as Fonseca 2002 and Rubio 2007.

The relationship between learning and affect holds for any classroom and any subject, but with non-native language learning it is crucial, given that students' self image is more vulnerable when they do not yet have mastery of their vehicle for expression –language. Undoubtedly, the main function of language is communication. As teachers we may have communicative goals built into our syllabus, we may design activities for communication, but often our students do not develop communicative competence. One explanation for this can be found in the area of affect. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1998:547) consider Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in a second language as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2," and argue that the main goal of learning programs should be to create in students this willingness. In their model there is a strong connection with affect of the majority of the factors which they found led to WTC, such as L2 self-confidence, intergroup attitudes, intergroup climate, and personality factors. Thus, if we want our students to communicate, to be willing to use the language they are learning, we do indeed need to take into account the many ways that affect will facilitate or undermine this goal.

If we ask what attention to affect would actually mean for the language classroom, on the one hand, it is probable that we would find some special classroom activities designed both to provide useful language work and to increase personal meaning, motivate, reduce anxiety or give students

confidence in their ability to learn and speak the target language. However, perhaps more important would be a new perspective on what language teachers can expect to achieve in the classroom, a greater concern for the learning atmosphere and for the inner processes of both learners and teachers. Underhill (1999:131) stresses the importance of this broader vision: "new techniques with old attitudes may amount to no change, while new attitudes even with old techniques can lead to significant change."

There are many indications from teaching experience as well as from empirical research that attention to affect can bring many positive changes to the classroom and that the foreign and second language learning and teaching processes will be more effective if they are affective.

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