



The Impact of Learners' Attitudes toward English on Learning Process in National University of the Inner Mongolia

Naixin Wang

The University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Rd, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ, UK

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Abstract: Nowadays, the acquisition of language is not a passive learning process influenced by teacher and learning environment, but an active cognition happening in student's mind. Therefore, student's attitude toward certain language can be seen as an important factor in language learning and acquisition. Especially in today's multilingual world, how learners view different language and the speakers of that language impact the achievement of language to some extent. In order to illustrate the relationship between language attitude and language acquisition, this study analyzes the secondary data of students' attitudes toward English in National University of the Inner Mongolia. Through comparing different students' attitudes and their learning achievements, the conclusion that language attitude is a multilayered concept and it plays an essential role in English language acquisition can be revealed.

Keywords: language attitude, learners, English acquisition, multilingual

1. Introduction

Learners' attitudes toward a second language and the attitudes toward the community that the language is related with are the main influencing factors in second language acquisition. Based on the definition of attitude, this essay explains the debate between behaviorist and mentalist perspective of explaining attitude and the role of attitude in relation to language. After presenting some scholars' existing findings in the impact of language attitude on language learning process, a study of students' attitudes toward English in National University of the Inner Mongolia is analyzed to illustrate the influence of language attitude on second language acquisition. Then implications of the findings in this study is concluded from the perspectives of language learning, education and social community.

2. The chosen context and debates in language attitude

The chosen context is the National University of the Inner Mongolia. People in Mongolia can speak more than one dialect including Mongolian, Jin dialect and Mandarin. In this context, students learn English as a second language not in a monolingual environment but a multilingual environment which is a typical case for analysis. Students' attitudes toward different languages and how different attitudes may influence the English acquisition process deserves discussion.

Although it is no doubt that attitudes have impact on behaviour and learning status, there are debates about a wide range of definitions of language attitudes. Generally, behaviorist view and mentalist view are two main theoretical approaches in language attitudes studies. Fasold (1984) finds that most language attitudes studies are based on the mentalist view which views attitude as a mental or internal state. In this view, attitude refers to internal consciousness, feelings and beliefs in mind rather than observable behaviour. Although attitude can not be observed directly, certain forms of response caused by attitude can be noticed through experiment. Attitude can be described as 'an intervening variable between a stimulus affecting a person and that person's response' (Fasold, 1984, p147).

Behaviorist is the other view of language attitude. Attitudes are the response to languages which can be studied directly through analyzing the language use in real interactions (Appel and Muysken, 1987). On this theory, people's attitudes toward languages can be observed simply in how they make response to the languages in the situation of social communications.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of this essay is the mentalist view of language attitude which believes language attitudes to have different components including emotional feelings, cognitive beliefs and action tendencies toward the language. Moreover, it is further expanded to the response toward certain languages or speakers caused by attitudes, including language maintenance and shift in a particular context.

3. Existing findings in the impact of language attitudes on language acquisition

The attitude of language learning focuses on how language use provides clues that reflects listeners' beliefs about the group and the speaker's membership (Chambers and Schilling, 2018). Therefore, language attitudes is not a single concept

but linking with identity and social membership as well. How listeners view themselves in learning a second language and what impression is caused by speakers of that language on listeners plays a vital role in speakers' behaviour in language learning process. The multilayered views that speakers hold toward the target language, the language learning environment, the native speakers' community and themselves as learners are closely related to success in language acquisition. Thus learners' attitudes toward a second language and the second language community have been discussed by different scholars.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggests that whether or not learners can master a second language depends on their attitudes toward the group and speakers of that language. Learners are more likely to learn the language associated with the group that they want to be involved in. For the language spoken by community that learners want to be separated with, they have less willingness to learn it. What's more, Oxford and Scarcella (1992) finds that learners who have positive attitude toward a language can receive more knowledge in learning process. Once learners hold a positive attitude in language learning, they can get more input compared with those who learn it passively. Because positive attitude are linked to the willingness of seeking opportunities to use the target language in interaction. Keeping a positive attitude in language learning has a circular effect where the more learners use the target language in communication, the more progress they can make in the acquisition process. Most researchers consider language attitude as one of the most vital factors in second language acquisition because of the crucial role attitude plays in language learning process (Evin, İnal, & Saracaloğlu, 2005).

4. A case study of national university of the Inner Mongolia

In order to investigate the implication that attitude and motivation bring to language learners and language learning process, a questionnaire survey was made by Zhao in 2015. The respondents in this research are students who learn English as a second language in the National University of the Inner Mongolia (Zhao, 2015). One hundred students whose average scores of English are A level in this university are invited to complete this survey. The common feature of their attitude and motivation toward English learning can be concluded as the main factor that links with high achievement in second language acquisition. What's more, the data from this research also provide corresponding teaching methods and strategies in second language teaching.

In this research, teachers ask students to fill two questionnaires. One focuses on the attitude of these students in English learning, the other is about factors that influence a student's success in English achievement. Zhao (2015) finds that students in level A of English hold a positive attitude in learning process. The data show that achievement of a second language is associated with positive attitude and motivation in learning process. Therefore, the implication that attitude brings to language can be concluded as a high motivation in English class, interest of the language and success of learning outcome. From the mentalist view of language attitude, attitude refers to the feeling, affection, emotion, cognition, perception and corresponding behaviour toward certain language and community. In multilingual environment, language attitude is motivated by peoples' perception of certain language and its function in relation to other languages in this context (Sadanand, 1993). People who have inclusiveness and tolerance perception of a new language are more likely to hold a positive attitude in language learning and can better master the language than those who are reluctant to accept a new language. Inner Mongolia adjoins Mongolia and Russia thus diverse nations and ethnicity can be found in this context. The multilingual environment and geographical situation in Inner Mongolia offers people the tolerance and understanding of diversity. This is the reason why most students in National University of the Inner Mongolia have a positive attitude toward English itself and native speakers of English.

5. Discussion of the relationship between language attitude and language acquisition

From an individual level, people's emotions and feelings toward a language are described as language attitude which can be influenced by cognition of certain language and background environment of language learning or using. The language attitude is one of the most important factors in academic success and students' motivation in language learning process.

From a larger level which refers to teaching pedagogy in education and social significance of language, language attitude also plays a crucial role. Three kinds of implications that language attitude causes in education can be concluded as concerning learner's affective characteristic in teaching, improving learner's self-efficiency and cultivating autonomous learning ability.

First, through the research, Zhao (2015) finds that effort and good teachers are two most important factors in success of English learning. Language attitude refers to learners' affection and cognition in mind. In order to prompt a positive attitude, besides the teaching content and methods, teacher could put more focus on affective characteristic in language education.

Second, as essential people who directly influence students' motivation in language learning, teachers have the duty to cultivate a positive leaning style for students. Because language attitude refers to an internal or mental state, an active learning style built in students' minds can better trigger a positive attitude. Teacher could use external factors, including

course design, learning tasks and teaching resources to help students develop a strong self-efficacy in education.

Third, similarly, autonomous learning ability is another essential factor that relates to positive language attitude. Dickinson (1995) suggests that autonomous learning refers to not only an ability of learning independently, but also an attitude. In a student-centered class, as the subject of learning a foreign language, students who have autonomous learning ability are more willing to seek opportunities for learning and using the target language than those learn it negatively. Therefore, teacher could aware students' emotion and thoughts and create a learning environment that allow students to learn for themselves through encouraging cooperation and negotiation.

6. Conclusion

Language attitude is not a single concept but associated with motivation, identity, language policy, multilingual or monolingual environment and language choice. The multilayered implications that different language attitudes bring to language education and social policy are influencing social significance of different languages and their representative speakers. In today's world, more and more children begin with bilingual even multilingual speakers. Their cognition toward different languages deserves more discussion in future's studies.

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