

Sardasht Educational Office

**The Study of the Factors inhibiting English Learning by
High school Students in Sardasht**

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Background and Purpose

In this chapter, I will present a brief introduction to the subject, statement of the problem and significance of the study. Then some delimitations of the study will be stated.

۱.۱. Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon. In sociolinguistics, we deal with a variety of subjects, the most important of them is the relation between language and society. It seems that language cannot be studied in isolation without reference to society because language is something that people use in their everyday life and there is a strong relationship between language and society. It is interesting to note that both language structures and social behavior can influence each other. In this regard, the term that comes to mind is social language. James Paul Gee (۱۹۹۹) defines social language as “different styles of language that we use to enact and recognize different identities in different settings” (p.۱۳). A close look at any language reveals that there are different styles to serve a specific function and speakers make constant use of these styles and different possibilities according to the situation. Speakers do not use the language in the same way all the time, and they appeal to new ways of expressing something for a variety of reasons.

The most important thing is that how languages are learned. There are different views about the sources of language, like the divine source, the natural sound source, the physical adaptation source, the genetic source and etc. Yule (۱۹۸۰). But there are some controversies about any of them and none of them is accepted by all the linguists. But what about learning a second or a foreign language. Is it the same as the first language, or there are some differences between them. In the present study I am going to study why high school students in Sardasht don't learn English well.

۱.۲. Statement of the problem

In Iran English has been taught for more than seventy years and in Sardasht it has been taught for about ۵۰ years. Every year a lot of time and money is allocated to English teaching by the government and also by parents in the institutions but unfortunately most of these efforts have been failed and students can only pass a course and after graduation from high school they are not able to utter some sentences in English fluently. What are the factors influencing English learning in our society? How can we concentrate our efforts in a good method for English Teaching?

۱.۳. Significance of the Study

I have been teaching English in high schools in Sardasht and also in institutions and universities for more than ۲۰ years but during this period I was not able to prepare good method for language learning. Since English is the most versatile language in the world and it is also the most commonly used foreign language, I think it is the necessity for people, especially young students to learn it and use it internationally. We must know our weaknesses and try to eliminate them.

۱.۴. Delimitations of the Study

This study had some limitations which are as follows:

۱. Not being able to spend enough time to observe adequate cases to collect enough data for my study.
۲. There was no access to much needed resources with regard to English Learning.
۳. Not having enough time to organize the material in a cohesive way, I was convinced to be satisfied with this limited draft.

Methodology

Having been born and teaching in a Sarvaśāstrī, I found my interest in sociolinguistic issues from the time of my elementary school. Why English is learned and taught internationally? Why some people can speak foreign languages, especially English well but others can't? These are questions to which I never found convincing answers. As an English teacher, I became more and more interested in sociolinguistics. One of the areas of sociolinguistics is that how can we learn foreign language fluently, What are the approaches and methods that help our students learn English? Learning and teaching a foreign language is an area of research in which sociocultural, sociolinguistic and critical methods interact, so the best method for studying them is ethnography. Ethnography, as its name implies, is a description and interpretation of social actions and social structure characteristic of a particular group of people.

Data Collection

For my present purposes, I attempt to find different situations in which English learning was not successful and qualitative research can provide a springboard to do this. Qualitative methodology can change its research plans to the new situations. According to Bryman (1994) qualitative research “emphasizes discovering novel and unanticipated findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to such serendipitous occurrences” (p.11). In qualitative methodology, the researcher sees the social world from the point of view of the actor, just as I observe the use of address terms in society. Bryman (1994) uses ‘naturalist’ field research, ‘ethnographic’, ‘interpretivist’ and ‘constructivist’ instead of ‘qualitative’, the methods I can use for data collection and data analysis in this thesis. For qualitative enquiry, Wolcott (1994) suggested three methods for data collection: “ participant – observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring) and study materials prepared by others (examining)” (p.11). Since our procedure for investigating language learning is qualitative, I made use of these methods. The data collected over this period were supplemented by my observation as a teacher.

Data Analysis

Procedures for Data Analysis

After enough data were collected, it was time to do something with the data. But it proved to be more difficult than data collection. Wolcott (1994) introduced three ways to present data: description, analysis and interpretation. These categories are not entirely exclusive. We discuss them for our present purposes. 'Description' poses the question "What is going on here?" In this way, we describe attempts to language learning. In this approach, the data are treated as fact. In the words of Wolcott (1994) "the data speak for themselves" (p.10). 'Analysis' goes beyond a 'descriptive' account.

As we saw, three ways of presenting data; description, analysis and interpretation are interdependent and we cannot separate them from each other. For the data collection, we cannot restrict ourselves only to a single method. For my present purposes, apart from observation, interviewing and text analysis, I also made use of my intuition as a teacher.

There are many factors that influence language learning. According to Farhady (1990) the most important of them are cognitive factors, affective factors and social factors. I will refer to them and their relation with my present study.

Cognitive Factors

In cognitive factors, we deal with such terms such as signal learning, stimulus response learning, rote learning, deductive learning, inductive learning, etc. Another variable of cognitive factors is that when a person is learning two or more languages simultaneously. Here the

learner may have some problems such as transfer, interference, over-generalization and so on. In transfer the sounds, structures and meanings from the first language of the learner interfere in learning a foreign language. Sometimes it is good that is positive transfer but most of the times it is bad that is negative transfer. In the case of our students it is negative transfer which inhibits learning English. Another domain of cognitive factors is methods and approaches applied in language teaching. Some of the methods are suitable for one class but not for other classes.

Affective Factors

Since language is taught to human beings and they are different from each other and every human being has a certain characteristics, in teaching a matter such as language we should consider these features that are affective factors. One of these factors is affect which refers to the emotions and feeling. Another domain is self-esteem. Some people have high self confidence and they are not embarrassed when talking to a group. In the case of our students most of them don't have enough confidence in their abilities and their knowledge.

Another factor in this area is anxiety which has a considerable effect on language learning. Anxiety can be debilitating and facilitative. It is debilitating in the case of our high school students.

One of the most important factors in language learning is motivation. It is defined as an inner drive, impulse, emotion or desire to achieve something, (Farhady 1990). According to Yule (1980), there are two kinds of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is to achieve some other goal like getting a degree, passing a course or finding a job. For most of the time it does not lead to language learning fluently. Integrative motivation is to learn language for social purposes such as becoming a member of the foreign language and being familiar with the social life of other communities. This kind of motivation is likely

to result to success.

Social Factors

Man is a social animal and language is learned in social circumstances and everyday interactions. If a child is brought up in isolation he or she does not learn any human language. The society and all its dimensions affect learning a language. One of the main social factors is the attitude which refers to one's likes or dislikes toward a particular language or the speakers of language. Farhady (۱۹۹۵). High positive attitude facilitate language learning while high negative attitude inhibits language acquisition. The students in our high schools have negative attitudes and this prevents them from learning English.

Apart from the above mentioned factors there are some other factors which influence language learning. They are dull textbooks, unpleasant classroom environment and an exhausting schedule of study and / or work. Our students have a lot of other courses apart from English and they have to devote much of their time to them so they don't have enough time to English.

Summary and Conclusions

Man is a social animal and language is learned in social contexts. It is impossible to learn a language in isolation. First language is acquired, that is it is learned naturally in every day interactions with other people but a second or foreign language is learned via deliberate attempt in schools and institutions. English is a foreign language in Iran that has been taught for more than 40 years in Iran.

In Sardasht it is also been taught for some decades but it was not successful. There are some reasons behind this failure that are cognitive, affective and social factors which inhibit language learning in our high schools. From the above material we come to the conclusion that if we want to learn English fluently, we should allocate more time to it. And we also learn it at the same order as our mother tongue, that is we should follow listening, speaking, reading and writing and we also take into account the culture of the people whose language we are learning. Without being familiar with the culture it is impossible to learn a foreign language because vocabulary and grammar are about language, not language itself. We, as teachers of English should be acquainted with the most up – to- date methods and techniques in language teaching.

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