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Part A Introduction

1 A map of the terrain

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Introduction

The term *affect* has to do with aspects of our emotional being; however, as Fehr and Russell (1984:464) have noted, ‘Everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition’. Damasio (1994:145) makes a distinction between the terms *emotions* (changes in body state in response to a positive or negative situation) and *feelings* (perceptions of these changes). Besnier (1990:421) refers to further categorization but brings up reservations from the anthropological point of view about cross-cultural validity of distinctions. In the present context, affect will be considered broadly as aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which condition behaviour. In this chapter we will be looking at a wide spectrum of affect-related factors which influence language learning.

It should be noted that the affective side of learning is not in opposition to the cognitive side. When both are used together, the learning process can be constructed on a firmer foundation. Neither the cognitive nor the affective has the last word, and, indeed, neither can be separated from the other. Damasio has shown how evidence indicates that even on the neurobiological level, emotions are a part of reason and, as he demonstrates, fortunately so. In years of clinical and experimental work he has been able to observe how the absence of emotion compromises our rational capacity. He affirms that ‘certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality’ (Damasio 1994:xiii). Neural scientist LeDoux sees emotion and cognition as partners in the mind. He notes how, after years of behaviourist dominance, cognitive science once again made it respectable to study mental states; and he insists that now it is time ‘to reunite cognition and emotion in the mind’ (1996:39). LeDoux goes so far as to say that ‘minds without emotions are not really minds at all’ (1996:25). Although psychologists have traditionally considered emotion to be the Cinderella of mental functions, today a reversal of this trend is evident. Oatley and Jenkins (1996:122) affirm that ‘emotions are not extras.

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They are the very center of human mental life ... [They] link what is important for us to the world of people, things, and happenings'. And there is a growing body of evidence that points to the significance of our emotions in maintaining our physical well-being; Goleman (1997:34) presents research which indicates that 'the afflictive emotions tend to make one ill and wholesome states of mind tend to promote health'.

A broad understanding of affect in language learning is important for at least two reasons. First, attention to affective aspects can lead to more effective language learning. When dealing with the affective side of language learners, attention needs to be given both to how we can overcome problems created by negative emotions and to how we can create and use more positive, facilitative emotions.

In the presence of overly negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger or depression, our optimal learning potential may be compromised. The most innovative techniques and the most attractive materials may be rendered inadequate, if not useless, by negative affective reactions involved with the language learning process. Anxiety, for example, can wreak havoc with the neurological conditions in the prefrontal lobe of the brain, preventing memory from operating properly and thus greatly reducing learning capacity (see Stevick this volume). Fortunately, language teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of negative emotional factors and of ways to handle them.

Looking at the other side of the question, stimulating the different positive emotional factors, such as self-esteem, empathy or motivation, can greatly facilitate the language learning process. A moment's reflection, however, leads us to the conclusion that in many situations much more attention is given to the question of negative emotions. For example, Damasio (1994) identifies five major emotions, under which others are subsumed: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust. Goleman (1995) also groups the emotions in basic families: anger, sadness, fear, enjoyment, love, surprise, disgust and shame. In these and other classifications, the majority of the emotions would generally be seen as negative. While striving to resolve the at least numerically more predominant negative emotions, one should not lose sight of the importance of developing the positive. Motivation, after all, is better guided by a move towards pleasure and what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls *flow* than by a move away from pain. Even Skinner (1957) claimed consistently more efficient long-term retention under conditions of positive reinforcement than avoidance of aversive stimuli.

A second reason for focusing attention on affect in the language classroom reaches beyond language teaching and even beyond what has traditionally been considered the academic realm. Daniel Goleman

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(1995) has convincingly presented his case for an 'expanded mandate' for all educational institutions. He points out that, especially since the eighteenth century, in Western civilization we have concentrated on understanding the rational, cognitive functions of our mind, while misusing or denying whatever falls within the realm of the emotions or the non-rational. One of the consequences of this situation is our current 'emotional illiteracy'. 'These are times,' Goleman states, 'when the fabric of society seems to unravel at ever-greater speed, when selfishness, violence, and a meanness of spirit seem to be rotting the goodness of our communal lives … There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stances in life stem from underlying emotional capabilities' (xii). He puts forth as a solution 'a new vision of what schools can do to educate the whole student, bringing together mind and heart in the classroom' (xiv) and shows how many educational programmes are already dealing very successfully with the emotional mind.

This expanded mandate can be fulfilled in all subjects across the curriculum, and foreign and second language learning is no exception. In a language classroom which focuses on meaningful interaction, there is certainly room for dealing with affect. Ehrman (1998: 102) states that 'it has become increasingly evident that the purpose of classroom learning is not only to convey content information'. In this context, Stevick (1998:166) speaks of bringing to language teaching a concern for 'deeper aims', for 'pursuing new "life goals", not just for reaching certain "language goals"'. As we teach the language, we can also educate learners to live more satisfying lives and to be responsible members of society. To do this, we need to be concerned with both their cognitive and affective natures and needs.

The relationship between affect and language learning, then, is a bidirectional one. Attention to affect can improve language teaching and learning, but the language classroom can, in turn, contribute in a very significant way to educating learners affectively. Ideally, we keep both directions in mind.

Language teaching reaching out

Just as language teaching has become increasingly open to information from vital feeder fields (for example, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, education and neuroscience), in the same way we have been witnessing in recent years a broadening of aims for the foreign and second language classroom. When pointing out the advantages of teaching thinking skills in the language classroom, Chamot also stresses

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the importance of collaborative learning. She notes that collaborative language work helps to develop Gardner's interpersonal intelligence, which 'is characterized by the ability to understand and respond effectively to others' (1995:4). This is definitely a step in the direction of emotional literacy. Freudenstein (1992) has argued that in our increasingly aggressive world, teaching peace has a vital role in the language classroom. *Idiom*, published by NYSTESOL, devoted an entire issue (1993–94) to peace and environmental education, and *English Teaching Forum*'s October 1993 issue was dedicated to 'Environment and ESL'.

Along with this diversification of objectives for the language classroom has come a new view of the language teacher. From the point of view of affective language learning, *being* is just as important as *doing*; a good language teacher *knows* and *does* but most essentially *is*. This does not mean that language teachers no longer need, for example, a firm command of the language being taught or proper training in language teaching methodology. It means that these skills will be much more effective if teachers are also concerned with their own emotional intelligence, as this can make a great deal of difference in the language learning process from the point of view of the learner.

Drawing on Sartre (1956), van Lier (personal communication) comments that in teacher training he finds it useful to set teacher development within a broad spectrum of experience. (See Figure 1.) *Having* relates to the knowledge (of subject matter and pedagogy, of self and others) and resources teachers have available, *Doing* to their skills and their abilities to construct learning opportunities, and *Being* to their personal qualities, their vision, and their sense of mission.

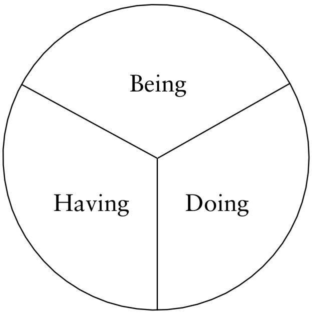

Figure 1 Areas for teacher development

Millett points out that when teachers focus on their students' learning, they 'begin to see that if they want to improve their teaching and become more aware of the learning, eventually they have to work on themselves'

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(interviewed in Johnson 1997:20). Thus, as part of their professional training, teachers can benefit from working on their personal development. As they come to know themselves better, they will also be able to understand their students better and lead them towards more significant learning and growth. As Griggs (1996:232) puts it, 'this awareness [of self] and belief in human potential is a transformative power in itself. It lays a firm basis for learning and working effectively and connecting deeply with the self as well as with others'.

The influence of affect in educational contexts

Interest in affective factors in education is not new. Already implicit in the writing of Dewey, Montessori and Vygotsky in the first part of this century, it gained importance with the growth of humanistic psychology in the 1960s (see Maslow 1968; Rogers 1969). Not unlike Goleman today, Rogers was pessimistic about mainstream educational institutions: 'They have focused so intently on the cognitive and have limited themselves so completely to "educating from the neck up", that this narrowness is resulting in serious social consequences' (Rogers 1975:40–41). Among the most notable applications of humanistic psychology to education was the Confluent Education movement, whose theorists, such as George Isaac Brown (1971) and Gloria Castillo (1973), stressed the need to unite the cognitive and affective domains in order to educate the whole person. With related aims, the Human Potential Research Project was founded by John Heron at the University of Surrey in 1970.

In the late 1970s and 1980s foreign and second language teacher trainers and writers expressed similar concerns. Stevick, Rinvolucri, Moskowitz, Galyean, among other representatives of Humanistic Language Teaching, were searching for ways to enrich language learning by incorporating aspects of the affective dimension of the learner. It has been stressed, however, that humanistic language teaching does not propose to replace teaching the second language by other activities, but rather to add to the effective language teaching going on in the classroom, where information and formation can co-exist (Arnold 1998).

Many of the major developments in language teaching during the past twenty-five years are in some way related to the need to acknowledge affect in language learning. The methods coming to the fore in the 1970s – Suggestopedia, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response – take into account the affective side of language learning in a very central manner. (Description and evaluation of these methods can be found in Asher 1977; Curran 1976; Gattegno

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1972; Larsen-Freeman 1986; Lozanov 1979; Richards and Rodgers 1986; and Stevick 1976, 1980, 1990, 1996, 1998.)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has had pervasive influence on language teaching in all its phases (syllabus design, materials, teaching techniques . . .), and it too gives affect its due. CLT emerged in the late 70s as a reaction to structuralism and to methods such as the audiolingual which neglected important affective aspects of learning and which were not successful in teaching learners to communicate. 'Communicative Language Teaching appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive process of communication received priority' (Richards and Rodgers 1986:83). Unfortunately, in some cases, CLT has been reduced to the implementation of certain types of activities, without engaging learners in real communication (see Rinvolucri this volume).

The Natural Approach, developed by Krashen and Terrell (1983), takes affect into consideration in a prominent way. One of the five hypotheses in Krashen's theory of second language acquisition is the affective filter, and Natural Approach classroom activities are designed to minimize stress.

Curriculum design in recent years has also been influenced by humanistic-affective currents of thought. In the past many experts on language teaching have tended to emphasize the language over the teaching, the *what* over the *how*; and theoretical linguistics has often occupied space that might more appropriately be given to insights from the field of education, for example. Van Lier (1994:341) states clearly: 'I would like to see the field of SLA anchored in education'. As a way to cure the 'classic schizophrenia' of an understanding of SLA which moves back and forth between education and linguistics, he has proposed the development of both domains through what he and others have called 'educational linguistics'. Current researchers in the area of curriculum design have developed undeniably humanistic learner-centred models (Nunan 1988; Tudor 1997), which show the necessity of focusing more on language learners and their experience rather than simply on the narrower field of non-learner related linguistic corpora.

Indications that learners themselves would welcome a greater focus on humanistic content in language classes are not lacking. A study of reading topic preferences among advanced level students of English in Spain showed that from a broad selection of reading texts, including the main types found in most EFL/ESL textbooks, those most highly ranked related to personal development (Avila 1997). Similarly, Moskowitz (this volume) has documented the favourable response of foreign language students to humanistic language activities.

A learner-centred language curriculum takes affect into account in

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many ways. Participation in the decision-making process opens up greater possibilities for learners to develop their whole potential. In addition to the language content, they also learn responsibility, negotiation skills and self-evaluation, all of which lead to greater self-esteem and self-awareness.

In an affect-relevant study on adult learners applied to course planning, Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) found that better learners look to their own experience as a resource, set learning objectives in consonance with their self-concept, process through several channels and have learnt how to learn. As learners, they are influenced by their feelings and do not learn when anxious or stressed. Learning for them is most effective when it is personally relevant and when information is presented through different sensory modes.

Among the recent developments of significance for language learning are those from the fields of psychology and neurobiology, and both acknowledge the role of affect. For example, Stevick (1996) discusses research from psychology on one of the most vital aspects of language learning – memory – and links it very closely with emotion. In their comprehensive overview of the contributions of psychology to language teaching, Williams and Burden (1997:44) argue that educational psychology shares much with humanistic approaches to language teaching, especially in the need to go beyond mere language instruction to a concern with 'making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the individual, with developing and growing as a whole person. We would argue also that it has a moral purpose which must incorporate a sense of values'. And current work on the neurobiological base of learning, which will no doubt have increasingly important implications for language learning and teaching, emphasizes the centrality of our emotional reactions in the learning process. Schumann (1997 and this volume) relates recent developments in neurobiology to affect and language learning.

Cognition or affect? Cognition and affect!

Noted learning and cognition specialist Ernest Hilgard recognized the need for an integrative approach: 'purely cognitive theories of learning will be rejected unless a role is assigned to affectivity' (1963:267). Speaking of mega-trends for learning in the twenty-first century, Gross has stressed the importance of whole-brain learning, which recognizes the contribution that affect makes:

> Insights into the ways in which our brains function have

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> generated tremendous excitement in scientific and educational circles over the past decade. It is now apparent that learning can be enlivened and strengthened by activating more of the brain's potential. We can accelerate and enrich our learning, by engaging the senses, emotions, imagination. (Gross 1992:139)

In the remainder of this chapter we will consider some of the specific ways affect relates to second language acquisition. In an attempt to provide an organizational framework for such a broad subject, we will look at affectivity in second language learning from two perspectives: that which is concerned with the language learner as an individual and that which focuses on the learner as a participant in a socio-cultural situation, an individual who inevitably relates to others.

Individual factors

The first of these aspects has to do with internal factors that are part of the learner's personality. Although learning a language and using it are basically interactive activities that depend on varying types of relationships with others and with the culture as a whole, the second language acquisition process is strongly influenced by individual personality traits residing within the learner. The way we feel about ourselves and our capabilities can either facilitate or impede our learning; accordingly, the learner-intrinsic factors will have a basically positive or negative influence, though there can sometimes be a mixture of liabilities and assets for each. It should be noted, of course, that the various emotions affecting language learning are intertwined and interrelated in ways that make it impossible to isolate completely the influence of any one of them. We now turn to some of these factors that are of especial importance for second language learning.

Anxiety

Anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension. Heron (1989:33) makes reference to what he terms *existential anxiety*, which arises out of a group situation and has three interconnected components that are relevant to the language classroom: '*Acceptance anxiety*. Will I be accepted, liked, wanted? . . . *Orientation anxiety*. Will I understand what is going on? . . . *Performance anxiety*. Will I be able to do what I have come to learn?'

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It is not always clear how foreign language anxiety comes into being. For some people it may be a case of having been ridiculed for a wrong answer in class; for others it may have to do with factors unconnected with the language class itself. In many cases, the roots may be found in what Heron (1989:33) terms *archaic anxiety*, which is 'repressed distress of the past – the personal hurt, particularly of childhood, that has been denied so that the individual can survive emotionally'. Thus unhealed past wounds may impinge on present situations with potentially threatening elements.

There are few, if any, disciplines in the curriculum which lay themselves open to anxiety production more than foreign or second language learning. There is a great deal of vulnerability involved in trying to express oneself before others in a shaky linguistic vehicle. It is possible in some cases that the methodology used can contribute to furthering anxiety. With the grammar-translation method one might assume a reduction of the possibility of anxiety, since the learners have relatively little of themselves invested in the activities required. However, with the advent of methods which focus on communication, and especially communication involving more personal aspects of one's being, such as feelings, if care is not taken to provide an emotionally safe atmosphere, the chance for the development of anxiety-provoking situations can increase greatly. This is particularly true if at the same time the stakes involved are very high, such as in academic settings, where the evaluation of the learner can conceivably have far-reaching consequences.

When anxiety is present in the classroom, there is a down-spiralling effect. Anxiety makes us nervous and afraid and thus contributes to poor performance; this in turn creates more anxiety and even worse performance. The feelings of fear and nervousness are intimately connected to the cognitive side of anxiety, which is worry. Worry wastes energy that should be used for memory and processing on a type of thinking which in no way facilitates the task at hand (Eysenck 1979). Although it is a major obstacle to language learning, anxiety can be reduced; suggestions for dealing with it can be found in Oxford (this volume), Horwitz and Young (1991) and Young (1991).

Inhibition

Making mistakes is implicit in language learning. We made them when we were children learning our first language, and we cannot help making them when we learn a second language as older children or adults. However, as young children, we were not inhibited and thus could participate freely in the learning adventure, taking risks as

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needed. When learning, we have to be able to 'gamble' a bit, to be willing to try out hunches about the language and to take a reasonable risk of being wrong. Inhibitions develop when small children gradually learn to identify a self that is distinct from others, and their affective traits begin to form. With greater awareness comes the need to protect a fragile ego, if necessary by avoiding whatever might threaten the self. Strong criticism and words of ridicule can greatly weaken the ego, and the weaker the ego, the higher the walls of inhibition.

Similar to Freud's idea of *body ego*, which refers to the child's conception of the limits of his or her physical self, is Guiora's use of the construct of *language ego* to explain the presence of language boundaries (Guiora, Brannon and Dull 1972). In the course of their development, the lexis, syntax, morphology and phonology of the individual's language acquire firm boundaries. During the early formative period the language barriers fluctuate, since learners are less aware of language forms and of making mistakes in using the forms, but once ego development is complete, the permeability of the boundaries is greatly reduced. (See Ehrman 1996 and this volume.) Thus it is that aspects of a second language may be rejected, as they do not fit into the patterns contained within the language ego boundaries. Post-puberty learners of a second language, for example, often report inhibitions when pronouncing the language or trying to use it for communicative purposes.

In the 70s and 80s studies were made on the effects of inhibition-reducing substances, such as alcohol and Valium, on pronunciation performance (Guiora, Beit-Hallami, Brannon, Dull and Scovel 1972; Guiora, Acton, Erard and Strickland 1980). The results were inconclusive, though there is strong intuitive support for the negative influence of inhibition on language learning. What was shown in one of the experiments was that the person administering the test made more of a difference on the scores than the tranquillizer. These results point to the encouraging hypothesis that human factors, rather than external chemical substances, can be most efficient in reducing inhibition.

Language teaching approaches in recent years have taken into special consideration the necessity of creating learning situations in which inhibition and ego barriers are lowered so that free communication can take place. Dufeu (1994:89–90) speaks of establishing an adequate affective framework so learners:

> feel comfortable as they take their first public steps in the strange world of a foreign language. To achieve this, one has to create a climate of acceptance that will stimulate self-confidence, and encourage participants to experiment and to dis-