Chapter One: Attitudes and Cultural Awareness

Introduction

Many factors enter into play in the foreign language learning/teaching profession. Attitudes, among other things, are the most important. Therefore, the present chapter deals with attitudes in foreign language learning, provides some definitions for *attitude*, and brings to light its characteristics. It, then, gives some insights into language attitudes as propounded by cognitive and social-psychological theories of foreign language learning, on the one hand, and the socio-cultural factors which shape them on the other hand. It also highlights the role of positive attitudes as predictors of successful foreign language learning. Another concern of this chapter relates to the investigation of the possible existing linkage between culture teaching and cultural awareness. Following this line of thought, this chapter puts special emphasis on defining culture and exhibiting its significance in foreign language teaching as a means of raising foreign language learners' cultural awareness. It, then, deals briefly with what cultural awareness exactly is and how it is closely connected with intercultural communicative competence. The chapter concludes with highlighting the way cultural awareness is raised via an instance of culture teaching models.

Section One: Attitudes in Foreign Language Learning

1.1. Definition of Attitude

An attitude can generally be elucidated as the way a person regards things that are part and parcel of his surrounding environment like people, objects, concepts, issues and so forth. However, the fact remains that there are multitudinous definitions of the term that emanate in the first place from the works of many renowned researchers (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Gardner, 1985) in quest of an overarching one. Bohner and Wanke

(as cited in McKenzie, 2010, p. 19), for instance, postulate that the adequate definition of an attitude is that of "a summary evaluation of an object or thought...". In a similar vein, Gardner (1985), like his counterparts in the field of FLL, endeavours to provide a comprehensive definition for the concept. In his opinion, an attitude is "an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent" (1985, p. 27). Additionally, other researchers (Chaiken & Eagly, 1998; Gordon, 1935) want to keep abreast with the burgeoning demands of the field of FLL. Consequently, it has been posited that an attitude can be defined as "the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the particular behavior of interest" (Ajzen, as cited in Chambers, 1999, p. 25).

1.2. Characteristics of Attitudes

Investigating the characteristics of attitudes has held sway in the field of foreign and second language acquisition. Obviously, it has gripped the attention of both fledgling and experienced researchers. Baker (1988), for example, makes this clear by laying out some basic characteristics of attitudes. These are summarized as follows (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 199):

➢ Attitudes are cognitive (i.e. are capable of being taught) and affective (i.e. have feelings and emotions attached to them).

➢ Attitudes are dimensional rather than bipolar- they vary in degree of favourability/unfavourability.

➢ Attitudes predispose a person to act in a certain way, but the relationship between attitudes and actions is not a strong one.

➢ Attitudes are learnt not inherited or genetically endowed.

➢ Attitudes tend to persist, but they can be modified by experience.

1.3. Language Attitudes

Language attitudes are an all-important ingredient in L2 acquisition. The type of attitudes held by the learner towards the language under scrutiny tends to play an important part in determining the degree of proficiency and success that they attain in their endeavour to learn it. That is, "a foreign language **…**is affected by a range of sociocultural factors such as language attitudes" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 67). As a matter of fact, language attitudes are deemed learner-made assessments towards a given language, be it an FL or an SL. However, it is worth noting that different researchers consider 'language attitudes' an umbrella term. Following this line of thought, Baker (1992) is of the opinion that they cover (as cited in McKenzie, 2010, p. 26):

1) Attitude towards language variation, dialect and speech style

2) Attitude towards learning a new language

3) Attitude towards a specific minority language

4) Attitude towards language groups, communities and minorities

5) Attitude towards language lessons

6) Attitude of parents towards language lessons

7) Attitude towards the uses of a specific language

8) Attitude towards language preference

1.3.1. Language Attitudes in Cognitive Theories of FLL

1.3.1.1. Krashen's Monitor Model

Krashen's monitor theory (1978) is one of the cognitive models which have recently

risen to prominence in the field of FLL. Undeniably, it is necessary to note that the role played by attitudes in L2 learning is in the forefront of the monitor model. This theory is "a collection of five hypotheses which constitute major claims and assumptions about how the L2 code is acquired" (Saville-Troike, 2005, p. 45). In a nutshell, Krashen (1982) posits that it consists of the acquisition- learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis.

According to Krashen (1982), the acquisition - learning hypothesis is based on discarding the widespread conviction which considers children as acquirers and adults as learners. Accordingly, adults are believed to have two possible ways at their disposal for developing their proficiency in an L2. Acquisition, in his opinion, is akin to children's process of acquiring their mother tongue. Hence, it is said to be implicit, informal, subconscious, or natural. Learning, however, is a conscious process in its nature. That is, it is concerned with rule-learning or "knowing about" a language (Krashen, 1982, p. 10). The leading light of the theory maintains that learning does not turn into acquisition. To defend his theory, Krashen firmly confirms that "a very important point that also needs to be stated is that learning does not 'turn into' acquisition. The idea that we first learn a new rule and eventually, through practice, acquire it is widespread and may seem to some people to be intuitively obvious…" (as cited in Ellis, 1985, p. 230).

In regard to the natural order hypothesis, it has as its main premise the statement that certain grammatical structures are learned in a predictable order i.e., some grammatical structures are believed to be learned before other structures whereas the monitor hypothesis sheds light on the two divergent roles of both acquisition and learning. In this respect, Krashen (1982, p. 15) asserts that:

The Monitor hypothesis posits that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Normally, acquisition "initiates" our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. Learning has only one function, and that is as a monitor, or editor. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been "produced" by the acquired system.

The fourth hypothesis in the monitor model, namely the input hypothesis indicates that the process of acquisition becomes possible only if the learner is furnished with enough understandable input that is one step higher than his current level as Krashen (1982, p. 21) proposes: "a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage i to stage $i + 1$ is that the acquirer understands input that contains $i + 1$, where "understand" means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message".

According to the principles of the monitor model, the affective filter hypothesis is concerned primarily with the affective factors that are in line with FLL, namely language attitudes, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence. Obviously, the hypothesis at hand stresses the paramount importance of attitudes in FLL which tend to control the affective filter as stated by Krashen in his book *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*:

The Affective Filter hypothesis captures the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition by positing that acquirers vary with respect to the strength or level of their Affective Filters. Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a

high or strong Affective Filter… Those with attitudes more conducive to
second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input,
they will also have a lower or weaker filter (1982, p. 31).

By way of summary, it is extremely pivotal to highlight the overriding importance that
is accorded to affective variables such as attitudes within the framework of Krashen's model.
The lower the affective filter, the more rewarding the results are as stated by Gass and
Selinker (2008, p. 403): "according to Krashen, two conditions are necessary for acquisition:
…and a low or weak affective filter". Thus, the necessity of holding positive attitudes
towards the target language and the alien culture is put in the picture.

1.3.2. Language Attitudes in Social-psychological Theories of FLL

1.3.2.1. The Acculturation Model

Probing into the factors that slow down the process of FLL and trying to demystify this
knotty issue has puzzled the bulk of researchers for decades. Evidently, Schumman is no
exception. He propounds the so-called the acculturation model (1978a, 1986) which posits
that "…Second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to
which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he
acquires the second language"(as cited in Ellis 1985, p. 251). Apparently, FLL is not
impervious to acculturation because, according to Schumman, they are part and parcel of each
other. In fact, he does believe that acculturation is "the social and psychological integration of
the learner with the target language group" (as cited in Gonzalez, 2004, p. 72). Similarly,
Brown (1980a) defines acculturation succinctly as "the process of becoming adapted to a new
culture" (as cited in Eliss 1985, p. 251). It is said to be concerned primarily with the causative