

Community Language Learning and Learner Anxiety

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Abstract

Community Language Learning, formed in the 1970s and 1980s, is considered to represent the Affective-Humanistic Approach, which emphasizes a holistic view of education and focuses on both cognition and emotion. The teaching philosophy of security and anxiety relief advocated by it is still an important guide for foreign language teaching today. This paper first introduces the philosophy of the community language learning, the linguistic view of learning and classroom teaching sessions, second analyzes the emotional anxiety experienced by learners in the five developmental stages of language learning, and finally analyzes how the community language learning can make language learning more enjoyable and productive by alleviating learners' anxiety through teachers' creation of a safe learning environment, group support and cohesion, and reflection activities.

Keywords

Community Language Learning; Learner Anxiety; Sense of Security.

1. Introduction

Community Language Learning (CLL), also known as the counseling approach, was developed by Charles A. Curran and his colleagues and advocates the application of counseling techniques to foreign language teaching. They redefine the roles of teacher and learner in the foreign language classroom as teacher (counselor)-student (visitor). In response to learners' foreign language learning anxiety, teachers need to understand and accept students' negative emotions, create a learning environment full of security and group support, and help students alleviate or overcome their anxiety, thus converting negative emotions into positive motivation to promote learning. The community approach to language learning is learner-centered, respects the needs of the learner, and reflects a humanistic view of whole-person education.

Curran believes that language teaching is a social process and that language embodies human interaction. Human interaction is a two-way interaction, and so should be teaching. Dieter Stroinigg (1980) describes the steps in the first lesson of the community language learning method: First, after the teacher and students greet each other and introduce themselves, the teacher explains the goals and regulations of the lesson. Second, six to twelve learners form a circle, with the teacher swimming outside the circle. What the students are to learn is translated into the target language by the teacher. The students speak into a tape recorder and repeat the teacher's translation. The teacher then plays the tape recorder and learners listen to their own conversations with others using the new language. The teacher writes the sentences produced by the students on the board, emphasizing issues of grammar, spelling and capitalization, and encourages students to copy the sentences on the board and then master their use by designing various activities. Finally, students collectively reflect on the learning experience of the lesson and express their feelings frankly. This teaching method seeks to closely integrate the learning content with students' lives. Learners gain new vocabulary and sentences, as well as grammar that is interesting and meaningful to them, increasing their confidence in learning the language.

2. Learner Anxiety in the Community Language Learning

The community language learning approach compares language learning to human growth in that learners go through five developmental stages in language learning, from complete dependence on the teacher to independent use of the foreign language (La Forge, 1983). Samimy & Rardin (1994) collected self-reflection reports on the community approach to language learning from nearly 100 graduate students at two universities. In this paper, we will quote some of the self-reflection reports to reflect the learners' anxiety at different stages of the community language learning method.

In the first stage, the learner is like an infant, unaware of the target language and completely dependent on the teacher for language content. The learner's new self arises in the target language. In the self-reflection report, where learners record their feelings when they first start learning a new language, anxiety is the most frequently mentioned affective variable. The main sources of their anxiety were unsuccessful language learning experiences in the past, poor relationships with the teacher, or discomfort with the teacher's teaching methods, see Quotation 1.

Quotation 1: "As a prospective learner of the Russian language, I felt threatened by a new learning situation. They would all be privy to my weaknesses as a language learner ... I only hoped I wouldn't appear foolish. ..." (Samimy & Rardin, 1994)

The second stage, like children, is when learners can try to talk with some independence using simple expressions and phrases that they have heard before, but still need frequent support from the teacher. Learners begin to build their self-assurance and independence, but are afraid of making mistakes, as in quotation 3.

Quotation 2: "I walked into class being very defensive of my own ego. I was ready to clam up for the whole evening if I made one bad error. , 1994)

In the third stage, learners begin to use the target language confidently to understand others and express themselves, increasing the range of independent activities, and teachers correct errors promptly. Some learners may begin to resist parental help.

In stage 4, learners have rudimentary knowledge of the language and can express themselves independently. At the same time, learners realize that the teacher can help them make progress in the target language, so they begin to ask the teacher for advanced language knowledge such as idioms and grammar, and feel secure enough to receive corrections from the teacher.

Quotation 3: "Any anxiety that I had at the outset slowly disappeared as I realized that it was all right to make mistakes and to sound far from native in my pronunciation..." (Samimy & Rardin, 1994)

At stage 5, learners are able to study independently and communicate freely in a foreign language, with the teacher remaining largely silent in the classroom. Learners are also able to help other slower progressing students in the group and benefit from interaction with them. As in Quotation 5.

Quotation 4: Sometimes, I found that some of the group members had some difficulties; I never wanted to leave them behind me but tried to go on exploring with them. (Samimy & Rardin ,1994)

It can be seen that the anxiety level is very high when the learner is initially exposed to a new language and is faced with a new learning environment, unfamiliar peers and an unknown language. With the help of the teacher and the students' increasing linguistic competence, the learners' anxiety is reduced. Learning anxiety decreases as learners begin to express the language confidently and increases again when mistakes are made. Anxiety was lowest when learners gained confidence and security as they became aware of the teacher's role and were able to accept the teacher's corrections openly, or even help other students in the group who were making slower progress.

3. How the Community Language Learning Approach can Alleviate Learner Anxiety

During the five developmental stages of language learning, learners face different levels of anxiety. Samimy & Rardin (1994) showed that in a communal language learning approach, the supportive environment created by teachers and peers, teachers' nonjudgmental attitudes, peer support and sense of community, and learning activities facilitate language learning and transform learners' anxiety into motivation and positive attitudes toward language learning. This paper analyzes how the associative language learning approach provides learners with a sense of safety to alleviate learner anxiety by incorporating portions of Samimy & Rardin's (1994) self-reflective report.

3.1. Safe Learning Environment Created by the Teacher

In the community language learning approach, the teacher is responsible for providing a safe environment in which learners can learn and grow. In the classroom, teachers provide students with a sense of safety in a variety of ways, including teachers using students' native language in the classroom; clearly informing students of their lesson schedule; providing language that is appropriate for students' cognitive level; structuring activities in the most appropriate way and setting time limits; and teachers' non-judgmental attitude toward student reflection (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Feeling safe is an essential element of the language learning process, and teachers provide different approaches depending on the stage the learners are at. When learners feel secure, they are free to devote their energy to the task of communication and learning rather than building and maintaining their defensive position (see quotations 6 and 7).

Quotation 5: "I felt very comfortable with the counselor/teacher because she spoke in a clear, non-condescending and supportive tone. expression was pleasant, and I felt as a learner, motivated to participate within the group." (Samimy & Rardin, 1994)

Quotation 6: "Throughout the experience I never felt tempted to judge my teacher on a like/don't-like basis. I felt free to be myself." (Samimy & Rardin, 1994)

3.2. Support and Cohesiveness of the Group

In community language learning, students work in community groups, for example, the group makes new sentences with the target words and later shares them with the rest of the class. This helps students to learn from each other without competing for ranking, which helps them to improve together and to feel that learning a language is no longer a boring and tedious task (Li Xinhong, 2009). Group activities allow students to better understand and rely on each other, creating a sense of belonging and honor and eliminating timidity, forming a learning community, and greatly enhancing learning effectiveness. As shown in Quotation 8, initially defensive learning stances were created due to students' internal insecurities, and later, as they were listened to by the teacher and other students, a shift from insecurity to security and trust was achieved, and group cooperation was enjoyed.

"At the beginning, I was hesitant to disclose my feelings. I wasn't sure what was going on; I feared criticism from the teacher and the other students. I felt isolated; and from this insecurity, I formed judgments of the other students and subsequently "armed Through the understanding of the teacher and later of the other students themselves, I was able to "disarm" and give myself fully-motivated. Through the understanding of the teacher and later of the other students themselves, I was able to "disarm" and give myself fully-head and heart-to the task at hand. Moreover, I felt more at ease with myself and my way of learning." (Samimy & Rardin, 1994)

3.3. Reflective Activities

As with most pedagogies, the community language learning approach combines innovative and traditional learning tasks and activities, including translation, group activities, recording, transcription, analysis, reflection and observation, listening, and free dialogue. La Forge (1979) suggests that the reflective model consists of five steps: statement of one's own classroom performance, evaluation of one's own classroom performance, commitment to future performance, comments to evaluate group performance, and suggestions for future classroom suggestions for future classroom activities. The features of this reflective model expand individual and group awareness of the context of the community's language learning experience. For example, in Quotation 8, "Today, I was afraid, so I didn't speak at all. That is not good for my English. Next time, I am going to try harder." (Samimy & Rardin, 1994). & Rardin, 1994) The reflections and commitments made by the learners in front of the group are perceived as serious and the subsequent lessons usually show a more active participation of the students. It is also a way to show the timid student that he is not alone in his struggle with fear. Many have experienced this, and the struggle to overcome it must be carried out as a common class project. As a result, the learner builds a sense of solidarity and works together on a task, which significantly reduces the learner's anxiety.

4. Conclusion

Compared to other traditional language teaching methods, community language learning focuses on the cognitive and emotional needs of learners and places more emphasis on teachers providing a sense of security for learners. In response to the different levels of anxiety that learners experience during the five stages of language learning, teachers act as language consultants to create a safe learning environment for learners, help learners receive support in group activities, alleviate anxiety, and improve language learning, reflecting a human-centered and learner-centered view of whole-person education. Also La Forge (1983) points out that two issues need to be taken into account when discussing the learning security of language teaching in associations. First, security and anxiety are culturally relative. A sense of security provided in one cultural context may produce anxiety in another cultural context. Each culture has unique forms and teachers need to be mindful of providing cultural security for their students. Second, creating an environment that is too safe for learners may not be desirable." Student safety is never absolute. Appropriate anxiety can motivate students and promote learning production." Therefore, it is an important challenge for teachers to balance learner safety and anxiety to truly create an environment that promotes teaching and learning.

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