



RISK-TAKING AND SELF-CONFIDENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Students pursuing their education overcome many obstacles which are created under lots of circumstances. Taking risks and self-confidence are very crucial individual behaviors those who want to learn a foreign language. This essay presents an overview of different perspectives of the risk-taking and self-confidence construct in the development of language skills in the target language. Its main purpose is to examine the role of both individual behavior in the learning foreign language. The first section introduces the term of risk-taking and its importance in language learning. The second section focuses on the levels of taking risks among students. The third section explains the role of teacher in the risk-taking process. The fourth and fifth sections analysis self-confidence and ways of building this ability among language learners. The last section explains relation between self-confidence and risk-taking behaviors.

Keywords: Risk-taking, self-confidence, self-assurance, foreign language acquisition, target language, courage, neuroticism, extroversion, hesitation, feedback.

“The world lies in the hands of those who have the courage to dream and who take the risk of living out their dreams- each according to his or her own talent.”

Paulo Coelho

Introduction

Nowadays, the world is becoming increasingly globalized and knowing a foreign language can give you a lot of advantages for building your future. Language learning is one of the most important areas in human society and this topic has been studied for many years. Scientists endeavor to determine human language learning abilities. The process of language learning is not only learning new rules, but also a process in which individual differences come into play. The environmental conditions, age, attitude towards the target language and learning itself, neuroticism, motivation as well as extroversion are common examples of individual



differences worth studying when helping students learn a foreign language (Irene Marin Cervantes, 2013).

In addition, the learner's ability to take risks and develop self-confidence also appear as important individual differences which have been considered as keys of success. Risk-taking behavior considered as a "developmental trait that consists of moving toward something without thinking of the consequences" (Alshalabi, 2003). Thus, learners engage a learning foreign language by taking risks because they enter the world of a language that is unfamiliar one. By taking risks, target language learner's give themselves opportunity to learn, to grow, to test their limits, and to see what they are capable of, at the same time it develops and enhances a learner's self-confidence and ability to manage and overcome difficulties. Self-confidence is also one of the important behavior for learner's because according to studies low level of self-assurance in students is associated with increased risk. In this article, I would like to highlight the various situations that arise in the process of foreign language acquisition among students.

Risk-taking refers to the agreement to venture into the unknown. Risk means taking a chance, trying something new, and possibly failing or succeeding. We all have to take risks in our lives because our life is full of risks. Taking advantage of the opportunity is one of the most important ways to help you advance your skills and gain experience. Danika Gordon a junior at SDSU majoring in Ag Business and Business Economics states, "Risk means new opportunities, and new opportunities mean great adventures". In language learning risk-taking is one of the most important features of a good language learner. Risk-taking is cited as an important characteristic in successful foreign language learning because learners must be willing to test assumptions about a new language and take the risk of making mistakes. One of the most universal definitions of risk taking found in the words of Beebe, one of the main researchers in the field. In her analysis of risk taking, she carefully captures most of its important characteristics. She describes this term as a "situation where an individual has to make a decision involving choice between alternatives of distinctive desirability; the result of the choice is unknown; there is a possibility of frustration" (Beebe, 1983, p.39)

Levels of risk-taking and its importance in language learning

Learning a language opens the door to great opportunities for people. People want to learn at least one language in their lifetime, communicate freely with people, and use their opportunities wisely. In this way, people's mentality affects their desire. In the process of learning a new language, important individual behaviors such as risk-taking, self-confidence, patience and diligence are required from students. For example, someone studies hard to achieve a goal and achieves the desired result, someone is always afraid to take risks to learn new knowledge due to lack of confidence. Risk-taking and self-confidence increase a person's desire to learn a new language. Every student has their own level of risk. This definitely affects their way of learning language. According to studies, psychologists have been found five degrees of risk-taking among the people. It should be noted that these levels are not the stages of development of all individuals. Risk-taking behavior is not a developmental process in



which an individual starts at the lowest level and progresses through the stages until reaching the highest level. The levels do not specify an age-appropriate range, rather the levels indicate different levels of risk-taking. It is possible that a young child will show the highest level of such behavior and continue to do so throughout life. However, a young child with a high level of risky behavior is more likely to gradually return to a lower level.

At the first degree of risk-taking is the highest level of risk-taking. Risk-taking students of this level are very agile, try to gain new experiences in learning a new language and never stop themselves. We can expect very high results from this type of students. The most important thing is to create a healthy environment for these risk-takers.

At the second level of risk-taking, risk takers are as much inclined to learn new things as at the first level. But first, they carefully study the work and pay attention to the rewards of this risk. At this level, language teachers should show children the benefits of language learning and encourage them to do so.

The third level of risk-taking the most common one among the language learners. This type of student is less willing to take risks in learning and they actively observe others around them. These students think about the failure of what they start and what others think about them. But at the same time, they tend to look like first level of risk-takers.

Role of teacher in the risk-taking process

Foreign language teachers usually struggle with students who prefer not taking the risk of learning new language. Teachers can inspire and build confidence in students by modeling risk-taking. Teachers can be model risk-taking by acknowledging their own shortcomings. Teachers should determine students' risk-taking abilities based on their individual variables such as sex, age, locus of control or self-esteem. These variables are different for each student and reveal each student's ability to learn a foreign language. Having knowledge of these variables assists teachers to recognize that risk-taking behavior rely on the learner, but also on the particular situations and other individuals involved in the specific language learning. The role of the language teacher is very important because he/she must encourage the creation of a classroom environment that is appropriate for the students' risk level (Lee & Ng, 2010). The teacher must also be supportive of the efforts, linguistic attempts, and decisions made by the students, regardless of the results. Students who try to use new language structures should be taught that mistakes are a part of language learning and the natural personal development of almost anyone. Explanation of that mistakes are natural helps students interact in an environment of tolerance and less worrying about their own mistakes. Below you will find some effective ways for teachers to develop students' risk-taking skills:

- ❖ **Creating friendly and safe English atmosphere for learner's.** In order to feel English environment teachers can decorate their language classroom with different interesting things such as posters, wall stickers, book displays, bulletin boards and etc. by the help of different words or motivational quotes encourage them take risks and use English language freely without any hesitation.



- ❖ **Create a mutual respect among students** Most of students hesitate to speak among different groups. For relieving stress or anxiety teacher should create mutual respect among students. While one student is speaking others have to listen carefully and give their feedback about student's opinion. It will definitely help shy students take risks and speak freely.
- ❖ **Trick your students into learning in ways where it seems much too much fun to be work.** Find different activities, games that encourage them to take risks. For instance, discover new things together and let them explain or show their own things other peers; try to show the students how you enjoy the lesson so that they can experience the same fun in themselves; let them give their own feedback and evaluate your lesson or ask what kind of topics are interesting for them. By the help of this you can observe your mistakes and plan your lesson depending on their interests.
- ❖ **Help them learn the language by correcting their mistakes** Usually students give up when the first risk ends with failure. But making mistakes can be very important for risk-takers because mistakes take you one step further to take the right step. Teacher should explain that making a mistake is not same as "failing". Failure is the result of a wrong action, a mistake is usually a wrong action. So when you make a mistake, you can learn from it and fix them. Let them see mistakes as a source of understanding.
- ❖ **Use material that is relevant to students' understanding** Teaching and learning materials can add important structure to lesson planning and instructional delivery. Study materials serve as a guide for both the teacher and the student. When students start learning by taking risk, they face various difficulties, such as understanding complex materials given by the teacher. These lead risk-takers to failure. Therefore, teachers should choose materials that are interesting for them, authentic and suitable for their level in the process of teaching students.

Self-confidence is very crucial in language learning. And it means an individual's self-assessment and self-esteem (Timirli, 2013; Annissa and Hacene, 2011). Self-confidence is replying the question; "How the others are seeing me?" Our insight is always connecting with others (Baltaş 2002) Self-confidence is a sense that has been present in every individual since their childhood, and that has two components such as lovability and competence (Mutluer, 2006, p. 8). Self-confidence is one of the most important qualities needed not only in language learning but also in our daily life. It is evident that self-confident students are enthusiastic, study harder, have higher motivations, and do not quit when difficulties confront them (Bong, 2002; Pajares and Miller, 1994; Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2005).

The ways of building self-confidence among learners of target language

"Self-confidence is a superpower. Once you start believing in yourself, magic starts happening". (Brooke Castillo). The role of the self-confidence is very crucial for every students or individuals life. Individual who has self-assurance can achieve everything during his/her



life. Low self-confidence can have a negative effect on learning foreign language. According to Rubio low self-confidence can lead to certain psychological conditions, such as feelings of insecurity, fear, anxiety and antisocial behavior. The same can be true of foreign language learning. Because of low self-confidence, a student cannot start learning a strange language well and it definitely affects students' motivation in order to learning target language. A student who lacks self-assurance may have a negative attitude towards the course and lesson classroom. But confident students believe in their abilities and have clear goals to achieve without worrying about results. Because they never stop working on themselves and take one step towards success. Speaking become one of the most important skill among other skills such as listening, speaking, reading. However, some students felt less confidence to express words or sentences. Arnold(2007) emphasizes that conversation or communication among individuals in group or classroom brings success faster than any material and technique. If teachers can build students' confidence in speaking it will definitely help to develop all language skills as well. And also teachers should be role model of self-confidence for their learners. In order to improve self-confidence in speaking there are a lot of ways which was determined by different scientists and language teachers. Every teacher can utilize that ways in order to build confidence.

- ❖ Give a chance for students by the help of creating English speaking atmosphere. In order to encouraging them speaking teacher should find strategies which are interesting to less confidence students such as role-play, small group discussion, storytelling or different songs.
- ❖ Emphasizing cooperation instead of competition can help anxious students relax. A cooperative learning approach develops interpersonal skills and encourages students to communicate. It even inspires shy or nervous students engage in class. It also gives students autonomy and ownership of their learning by making them responsible for their learning process.
- ❖ Give students different topics to prepare at home and ask them to record their voices and analyze their own mistakes.
- ❖ Organize your own speaking clubs. Because the teacher should always be a role model for students. With the helping of speaking clubs they listen you and try to use the words or ideas their daily life which you used in your speech.

Connection between self-confidence and risk-taking abilities

Individual behaviors which self-assurance and taking risks are related each other in a number of ways. The learners are often afraid of taking risks in language learning, but when they have confident in themselves, he can take risks without any hesitation. If the student has a high level of self-confidence, he is inclined to take risks and will definitely achieve the desired result. In short when you take risk it can increases your self-confidence or if you believe in yourself it leads you to take risks.



Conclusion

In the conclusion, learning a new language opens the door to many opportunities for you in the developing world. In order to learn foreign language students should have enough personal abilities. That is why risk-taking and self-confidence effects foreign language learners in many ways and have a crucial role in learning target language. These abilities enable risk-taker and self-confident students to realize their potential and lead them on the path to success. Not all students have these abilities, so teachers should encourage students to take risks and be confident by the safe classroom atmosphere or different activities in the target language.

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