



INTER
FACES
CIENTÍFICAS

EDUCAÇÃO

ISSN IMPRESSO 2316-333X

E-ISSN 2316-3828

DOI-10.17564/2316-3828.2018v6n2p129-137

A CASE STUDY ABOUT A STUDENT'S RELUCTANCE TO SPEAK IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE IN CLASSROOM SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This small-scale case study attempts to explore the causes of one adult student's reluctance to speak English in classroom in Aracaju, Brazil. The research employed semi-structured interviews and class-

room observations to collect data. It will detail the reasons as to why the student is not at ease learning and speaking this foreign language and interpret the reasons why.

1 INTRODUÇÃO

The subject of this research is a 51-year-old Brazilian psychiatrist who is a pre-intermediate English student. He was selected for observation and data collection for this case study. He was taught English language in classes that are taught one-on-one in his own clinic, 3 lessons per week, 50 minutes each, using the book, Cengage's World English 2. We chose this book because of its variety and heterogeneous content.

It guides a student to several critical discussions on a variety of topics with a multi-subject approach, thus teaching English to a student for a globalized world. Using this book, we focused on teaching four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Speaking being the predominant usage of English, we encouraged discussions on topics relevant to the student with the intention to motivate him to continue and be vested in his studies.

Knowledge and understanding the motivations and learning style of each student is of utmost importance, including past learning experiences, and his learning experience with L1 and L2. The student reported his main expectation as to be able to "speak fluently" or "communicate" in the language.

The student demonstrated a certain weakness in listening and speaking. With regard to speaking, I believe that his "ego" is affected because he is a well-known doctor from a recognized clinic in the city and does not want to appear incompetent due to his inability to speak a foreign language.

This makes him a bit reluctant to speak. During the experiment, Whenever the teacher asked questions in English, the subject would start responding in English, but in the middle of the sentence, he would stop and start speaking in Portuguese.

It can logically be assumed that this was perhaps out of fear of making mistakes and not being able to speak grammatically correct sentences. This resulted in an adverse impact on the student's learning of the language.

Quarterly reviews of student's learning were made, in which comments were provided on what needs to

be improved. The student agreed that he was reluctant to speak English. He reported the reason as being not sure of his capability of speaking the language, and at such times of doubt, he prefers to speak in Portuguese for "fear" of making mistakes.

However, the teacher explained to him that the courage to make mistakes is important and necessary for learning because it allows the teacher to detect the issues faced by the student and to provide necessary support. However, even being aware that it is important for him to speak English in order for the teacher to help him learn, the student remained reluctant to speak. With the analysis carried out so far, it can be argued that the student's expectations regarding his oral competence were very high, which created obstacles in his learning process.

Specific Research This research explores the student's reluctance to speak, his personality, the influence of his motivation and his cognitive abilities in relation to remembering the language, learning new specific vocabulary, and the process through which he learned L1 and was learning L2. It also explores how the student see himself in the future, his long-term goals, fears and motives regarding his English language learning.

It defines the possible selves and after defining the possible selves, the paper studies the relationship between the student's motivation to learn English and his own identity, as it builds a relationship between the concept of possible self and motivation. This has practical significance because better understanding of individual social and psychological differences among students helps in improving the quality of instruction. According to Dörnyei (2009), "learning a language after puberty involves a combination of social, psychological, and not just cognitive and maturational factors.

These factors interact with one another according to the individual." We need to know as much as possible of our students so that we can use the correct approach and thus motivate the student to learn the target lan-

guage. As we can also see in Ellis's book, (Ellis, 2004: 544), "the case of L2 acquisition (SLA), learners vary not only in the speed of acquisition but also in their ultimate level of achievement, with a few obtaining native-like competence and others stopping far short.

How can we explain these differences in achievement? Broadly speaking, three different sets of explanatory factors have been identified: social, cognitive, and affective." Reluctance to speak and student's personality: Ortega (2013, 192) argues "Learning and using a foreign language poses a threat to one's ego.

It makes people vulnerable – particularly grown-ups who are accustomed to function perfectly well in their own language." Literature has attempted to understand students' effective filter and impact on learning as mentioned by Arnold (1999, 10): "[d]uring 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". Remembering the language/ learning new specific vocabulary: Understanding how the brain functions and how information is processed by students as internal and external linguistic foci is important.

As (Saville-Troike, 2006: 173-178) argues, we need to focus on "what" and "how" to understand how inputs and outputs are processed in order to try to understand the influence of L1 in the L2 learning of the subject. Cognitive abilities: Vygotsky's theory assumes that cognitive development, including the development of language, arises as a result of social interactions.

Unlike psychological theories that see thinking and speaking as related but independent processes, sociocultural theory views speech and thought as closely intertwined. (...) Interaction facilitates cognitive processes, giving students access to the input they need to activate internal processes (Lightbown & Spada, 2006: 118-119). When we understand the process, we acquire language capabilities.

The influence of the student's motivation: As stated in Modell (2003, 108) (Apud and Dörnyei, 2009) 'There's no desiring without imagination'. The subject

student claimed to have chosen to study English because he liked the language and wanted to study in the USA. According to Ellis (1995), understanding individual motivations makes it easier for the teachers to approach students through the lens of students' individual motivations, providing conditions that promote each student's intrinsic motivation.

It might be speculated that most English learners are motivated by their desire to have the experience of living in a country where English is the mother tongue, since Gardner (2001, 5), when mentioning Ortega (2013), says that there is a genuine interest in learning the second language to approach another language community as a "dynamic process fluctuat[ing] over time," (Shoab and Dörnyei 2004, 36) involving different variables and factors.

The learning context and emotional involvement strongly influence the development of L2, and are likely to play a role in implicitly-acquired knowledge. His previous experiences related to language were gained only in high school, and the linguistic teaching in Brazil uses structuralist approach, giving more attention to grammatical competence rather than to communicative competence. The way the student learned L1 and is Learning L2: According to Chomsky (1986, 1995), Pinker (1984) and White (1989), if there is a critical period that restricts the learning of the second language acquisition, it is shown that that restriction is controlled by the acquisition experience and learning of the first language.

His long-term goals, fears and motives regarding English language learning: According to Ellis (2004 p.537), for motivation, it is important to understand the extent to which students are prepared to pursue their learning goal and how they see themselves as part of the L2 community.

Possible Selves: A notion discussed in Dörnyei (2005:11), which builds on the intellectual work of Markus and Nurius (1986: 954-960), proposing a model of motivation for learning L2 that reformulates the motivator construct itself, thus thinking in the psychological theory of "possible selves" as "ideal selves that we would very much like to become,"

“selves that we could become,” and “selves we are afraid of becoming”. As the “cognitive components” and the “hopes and fears, goals and threats” (p. 954), providing ideas of what “is possible for us to be” (p. 960). In this way, it would lead the student to reflect on the possible selves, and thus to identify and label the person he could become, as explained by Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009 p.3).

2 MATERIAIS E MÉTODOS

The objective of this research was, therefore, to analyze the student’s reluctance to speak the target language in the classroom. What is making him reluctant? And why? There are several ways research can be approached.

Different styles, traditions, or approaches use distinct data collection methods, but neither prescribes nor automatically rejects any particular method (Bell, 2008). The methodology chosen for this research is a case study and qualitative research.

For Goode and Hatt (1952), the case study is a means of organizing data, preserving the unitary character of the studied object. It considers the unit as a whole, including its development (person, family, set of relations, etc.).

It is worth remembering, however, that the totality of any object is a mental construct, since there are no tangible limits if they are not related to the object of study of the research in the context in which it will be investigated.

Therefore, through the study of the case, the intention is to investigate, as a unit, important characteristics to the object of study of the research, which are related to his reluctance to speak the target language. According to Duff (2012), the case study allows for greater flexibility in the way the analysis is developed, and exemplifies a situation in a concrete and immediate way.

The purpose of the case study is to particularize and return attention to what has theoretical significance, involving different units of analysis. This research method “arises out of the desire to understand complex

social phenomena” (YIN, 2013, p.4) and generally the main questions are formed by “How” and “What”.

This research employs a qualitative approach to data collection about the motivations of an individual so as to understand and interpret certain behaviors, opinions and expectations. It is exploratory, so it is not intended to get numbers as results, but rather insights that may indicate the path to correct decision making on a problem question.

The most used resources in the qualitative research are the semi-structured interviews, in-depth observations in the field, etc. It is aimed at deepening the understanding of knowledge already quantified and to create a knowledge base for later quantitative testing. For this research, the qualitative methodology of field research was chosen to try to understand the reluctance of the student in learning the target language.

This study used a semi-structured face-to-face interview as the appropriate mode of collecting meaningful qualitative information. Specific questions- Interview Questionnaire:

- Why do you want to learn to speak English?
- How important is it for you to speak English?
- How do you feel about learning English, in general?
- Please tell me about your first contact with the language.
- What previous experiences have you had with English?
- What do you most enjoy doing in the classroom?
- How do you feel when you speak English?
- How important is it for you to speak the target language?
- In which situations do you feel most comfortable speaking the language? Why?
- In which situations do you feel least comfortable speaking English? Why?
- What do you think we need to do to make you speak English more, in the classroom?
- What would be the way to make you feel more comfortable speaking the target language?
- Is there an activity you enjoy the most in the classroom? Could you comment on it, please?

3 RESULTADOS E DISCUSSÕES

The researcher conducted the interview with the student. The interview was planned for two possible days: Tuesday or Thursday, depending on how the student was feeling. The researcher believed that the day influences the interview.

On Tuesday the student was comfortable, the purpose of the interview and how it would be conducted was explained to him. The entire interview was tape-recorded, assuring him of the privacy of interview data.

In order to avoid discomfort of the subject student, the interview started with addressing other warm-up topics such as his previous experiences and why he was studying English. When we began the more specific questions it was observed that he took longer to respond and gave me more calculated answers in a controlled way.

When asked when did he not feel comfortable speaking English, he replied that it was when he realizes that the other person has a higher level of English competence than him, he does not feel good. He also reported that last week, he gave a lecture in a University Hospital, in Portuguese, and he felt very comfortable, because he felt he was in control.

He was asked if he thought this reluctance and feeling of lost control when speaking English, were related to his status as a recognized and well-known person. He replied that he felt that other people could judge him, he felt a certain sense of being judged.

Asked about what the teacher could do to get him to talk more in class, he replied “ nothing”, since he did not feel being judged in the classroom, there he felt comfortable and knows that the teacher was there to help him. He also reported that he felt that he was at a stage in his life where he liked to listen to people more, than to talk and that this was also reflected in the classroom.

The semistructured interview gave the researcher the freedom to be guided by the responses in order to insert follow-up questions for more in-depth understanding.

CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

The primary reason as analyses presented by the case study as to why he is not expeditious in his learning and speaking English is the ego effect. Ego is that self-actualizing drive that necessitates a human being to feel fully in control of his or her character, personality and profession.

In this case, the person under study felt that he had attained control over his profession and life and not competency in English, that lack of control in his articulation caused him to feel rather embarrassed and so the enthusiastic in learning the new language.

Another point connected to this is the fear of making errors in speech, at his age he had overcome most of the teething problems portioned to his profession and so this new endeavor that exposes him to errors before he gains competency for him seemed like a failure rather than a learning process (Atay 140).

Another reason for his reluctance was the age effect. At the age of 51, a person is considered to have a limited ability to learn new stuff. His malleability is reduced, and hence the capacity that was to learn and actualize a new language is considered reduced and hence the competency levels.

Moreover, at this age, the mind and learning faculties are deemed to be blurry. Therefore the learning amplitude is reduced rendering the learning process tedious and consequently reducing the learning and speaking enthusiasm (Atay 140). The methodology of the study is also an aspect as to why the case subject was not able to effectively learn the new language.

The classroom oration and lecture presentation were more to him as an embarrassing moment than a learning process. It's imperative that one often speaks the language they hope to learn in order they can ingrain it in their memory. However, for this individual, the English oration that was meant to aid him to speak English, coupled with his fear of making syntactical errors caused him not to articulate and learn English properly (Atay 140).

The last reason as to why the case subject could not attain English language proficiency was the very reason as to why he was studying the language, to begin with. According to him (noted from the interview) he was in-

terested in acquiring knowledge of this new language majorly for professional purposes. Therefore he has insufficient interest in learning it for knowledge sake.

Therefore he only saw it as a facet to be acquired only for a certain and limited reason and not for daily life. Therefore his enthusiasm was gravely limited only to professional necessity (Atay 140). To conclude, having analyzed and interpreted the reasons as to why this Brazilian national was reluctant to speak English, the findings indicate that the reasons were more personal than systemic. It would be significant for him to work on his mental approach towards the new language acquisition than on his fears and setbacks. Only then can his enthusiasm be increased and his language receptibility significantly improved.

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Recebido em: 12 de outubro de 2017
Avaliado em: 26 de outubro de 2017
Aceito em: 12 de dezembro de 2017

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