My Failure Experience to Learn Second Language

and SLA

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(716 words)

Chinese is the only second language that I experienced big failure to learn. I was horribly frustrated to learn Chinese in Chinese Class which was my first class in university. I had never been in such a huge chaos learning second language until I took the Chinese class. I will introduce my failure experience of learning Chinese and three reasons why the class did not work to me. To explain the reasons, I will use three of hypothesis in second language acquisition by Stephen Krashen, which are the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis.

First, the Chinese class I took was not the best-fit to me according to the natural order hypothesis. I was required to speak full sentences in Chinese from the very first class, even though I was just a beginner. I had almost no opportunity to have a silent stage. I felt like a new-born baby who was demanded to speak right away. The class skipped the first two of four stages that the natural order hypothesis proposed. To me, it was not the natural sequence in the way children pick up their own first language because I was only in baby level. This means that the class was not easy enough. I should have taken much easier class in a pre-production and early production stage. if I had considered natural order hypothesis and my Chinese level.

Second, the reason Chinese class did not work to me can be supported by the input hypothesis. I was not very familiar with Chinese characters, which meant that my Chinese vocabulary level was very low. My knowledge about Chinese words seemed even worse than Korean average’s. It caused me that I found myself difficult to connect my prior knowledge-poor vocabulary level- and the content the Chinese class was offering. In addition, I was given few of visuals, realia, gestures that could help me to understand the class. The Chinese class was far beyond my current level of competency.

Third, affective filter hypothesis can explain why the class was not very successful for me. Since I had to speak Chinese every class, it was too challenging. I felt so nervous and uncomfortable that I sometime had a stomachache during the class. The worse thing was that the more I learned in the class, the higher my anxiety level went because I felt too much pressure to speak more and more complicate sentences. There were more things that caused my self-confidence fall to the bottom. The students in the class were in more than intermediate level. Most of the students had already studied Chinese for more than two years, because many of them graduated from foreign language high schools. Whenever I took the class, I had to communicate with other students who were already familiar with Chinese. It was badly frustrating. About 1 month later I started to take the class, I felt almost helpless to catch up the peers in the class as well as the class itself. I lost all the self-confidence to learn Chinese, and I finally dropped it. High-anxiety learning environment and losing self-confidence limited my learning of Chinese as affective filter hypothesis proposed.

To sum up, I explained my failure story of the Chinese class in the university and the three reasons from SLA with the specific examples. The three of SLA I mentioned are the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis. Even though it was definitely frustrating experience and I failed to finish the class, it did not mean it was a bad class. It was just not for me. It could be effective and good enough for other students. I learned that I needed to choose a class carefully especially when I started to learn second language. SLA offers me a good reference to make a better choice, because it helps me to understand what I need to learn step by step and what class can be fit to me. My failure experience leaning Chinese led me to understand more empirically the process by which people learn language in addition to our native language. Thanks to the painful experience I had, I could have a valuable chance to understand SLA more deeply and to have more empathy to my students in the future.