



Podcast #: Reflections on Language Acquisition

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Host: Skyla Matteson

Guest: Fawn Printz; Susan

Description: Listen to Host Skyla and guests Fawn and Susan; multi-lingual college students, as they reflect on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and the Critical Period, with their own language experiences.

Transcript:

- **Skyla Matteson**

Hello, my name is Skyla Matteson. I am with Fawn Printz and Susan, my guests for today. The first question I have for them, when learning your second language, did you feel like emotions affected your performance in any way? So I have the example, "your level of motivation or any anxiety going into your second language". But before answering the question, what languages do you know?

- **Fawn Printz**

I speak French and I also speak Japanese.

- **Susan**

I speak English, Spanish and Thai.

- **Skyla Matteson**

I speak English and American Sign Language. When learning your second language, did you feel like emotions affected your performance in any way?

- **Fawn Printz**

I mean, personally, I started learning French when I was in high school; I feel like my emotions definitely, affected my performance. Because I mean, when you're a teenager, obviously; you don't want to be called out. You don't want to perform in front of your peers. You're always afraid of making mistakes. So, I definitely didn't practice or engage with the language like I should have. I feel like that also kind of carried into college when I started speaking Japanese as well. I carry a lot of that, being afraid to make mistakes. Therefore, I wasn't really applying myself to the language and there was that really big barrier for me. So, I would say, yeah, my emotions definitely got in the way of my performance.

- Susan

I would say that, yeah, my emotions did get in the way of my performance. I learned English. English is my second language. At the age of six years old; I was in kindergarten. So that having to go to school, and being surrounded by people, who only spoke English, motivated me to have to speak English. I guess at a young age, it's like easier to learn a second language. Just because you're surrounded by so many people and children; that you want to play with and just be around, make friends. So it's easier for me to learn English. I would say that the anxiety or the scared of, the fear of making a mistake came in my adulthood, when I learned my third language. And because Thai, is very different from Spanish or English; the anxiety was and the pressure was more.

- Skyla Matteson

More influenced with like outside environments, when learning-

- Susan

Yeah.

- Skyla Matteson

-the language itself. I also had um the pressure of that whenever it came to outside-outside factors affecting my emotions, when learning American Sign Language. I had possibly like some pressure when learning Spanish, I learned a little bit of Spanish in high school. I did not really obtain it, so that's why I'm not really talkative about it. But I had, I probably should have took it more seriously. Especially with other classes- the other classes having; like pressure applied to me, that I did not focus as much as I should have. But with American Sign Language; I tried my best to have like a less, like, stress-free environment, which probably was not the best way to take it. Since it was my very first semester at OU. That in itself, was a little bit chaotic. To continue on with the next question; with the languages that you know, do you believe emotions affected your L1, growing up?

- Fawn Printz

I didn't mention it, I should have. But obviously, I'm a native speaker of English. I wouldn't say that emotions affected my acquisition of English at all, because I wasn't really conscious of it. It's kind of, it's kind of just something that you pick up and you just start doing; babies don't have this concept of fear of making mistakes, or being like patronized, or being judged for said mistakes. I-I don't, I would say no. I don't think that emotions really played a part in it at all. Other than maybe some anger of not being able to say what I want to say, maybe that pushed it along. But it definitely isn't the same emotions as my L2.

- Susan

I would-I believe, yeah, it might have affected in terms of; I had my first language being Spanish and I would only speak English, in school and with my siblings. So being surrounded by a language that is not native to you-you start slowly, losing practice with your first language and that's how I feel it was for me. Because my Spanish slowly got worse, as I only spoke with my parents in my, like, first language. I guess it was more like the feeling of

wanting to like fit into school, like those emotions. I guess like over time, you-you don't really lose, you don't really lose a language; you just slowly start.

- Skyla Matteson

Don't feel, as fluent within it..?

- Susan

Or, just like you don't practice it as much.

- Skyla Matteson

For me, I think whenever it came to like emotions like affecting my L1 growing up; I think, it whatever, like starting out with the language; it didn't really have much of an effect, it came naturally. But I think as, growing up, like within school and then having your own ideal of; like how sentences are formed because you base it off of, like, your parents. And then you have someone, that they are telling you, "This is how it is", kind of how like syntax, "This is a syllable, or if this is a determiner." Kind of like putting it into certain categories, and then wanting you to fit into that, ideal whenever it comes to, your language learning experience. So, I think I felt a little bit of pressure with that, especially with someone trying to have me fit into me learning English, when I already felt like I knew English. With language acquisition of the languages that you learned or acquired; was there any particular method or style, that- that helped you learn that specific language, that your teacher or your family taught you?

- Fawn Printz

So the one that definitely sticks with me, is my my Japanese courses in college. I don't know if it really, if it helped me learn via like the style; but consistency and the repetition of having the same style in our classrooms, really had things sticking with me. Because I always knew what to expect in the classroom. My Japanese professor would always- it was always, a presentation and an explanation over grammar point we were learning, and then it was- following that- it was practice. So whether it was like speaking, or a worksheet, or some kind of use of what we just learned. And then after that, it was assessment. So and-it always followed the same presentation, practice, assessment style. And I think that having that repetition, really helped me, because in my-my French classes in high school, it was kind of all over the place. You know, we never really knew what to expect. And I think that going back to the emotion part; not knowing what you're going to be studying or how you're going to study it, it can cause a lot of- a lot of anxiety. Which I think can get in the way of learning. And obviously, I know Japanese a lot better than I know, French. So and I think that that plays a big part of it.

- Susan

Yeah, I think- Well, for me, the one that sticks out the most is in college, I learned Thai. And the style is very different from Fawn's style. My teacher would give us like, we would get worksheets and she would always assess what we remember from the previous class; and see if we actually grasped what we were taught. And if we weren't, she would re-teach it and it was kind of nice. We were a very small class, not-not a lot of people were in the class. We

were able to do that kind of one-on-one styled teaching. She would, like, reassess what we learned and we've learned it; and then she would write things on the whiteboard. She would have us interact with each other, and have conversations, just-it was very hands on-

- Skyla Matteson

Rather than, "Okay, here's a worksheet. Um, have this done by the end of the class, don't work with each other."

- Susan

Yeah, it was like a worksheet at the beginning of the class. It would be assessed to implement what we learned, the last time that we were in class.

- Skyla Matteson

American Sign Language, for some of the teachers- some of the educators of American Sign Language, at the university. Some of them mainly sent out a lecture of them signing, with the captions already there of, like, the signs. The sentences or ASL gloss, and ASL gloss is, I guess; like how you would form sentences, but in American Sign Language, like how you would structure sentences. They would show that to us first. And then whenever we went into the classroom, the majority of my teachers, I remember; N-Nicole Carlo, one of the first things that she did, " Okay, you guys pair up. Here's the topic for the day. You guys sign to each other." Sometimes it's just like, "oh, okay, I have no idea. I tried paying attention to the lecture last night. But I am not fully, for sure." And you kind of bounce off of each other; trying to figure out, like the topic or how to break stuff down. It was stressful, especially since sometimes you don't really know what a professor or instructors, like, motivation, like behind you learning. Because they already have, an idea of, what they know; but they're trying- they're supposed to, like, attempt to adapt to us, the students and like our learning methods. But sometimes it can be accommodating and sometimes it can't or it seems it is less accommodating. I feel like it was beneficial for my American Sign Language classes. The majority of my teachers had quizzes and tests via online, especially since I have the accommodations of extra time but I felt, a little bit, less stressed having, maybe 10 questions on a sheet trying to figure out and then possibly having 10 other students looking at me as like I might be the last one answering your question. So it was I think it just depends like on the instructor and their motivation on what they want you to learn and how they- they base it off of how you learn and what they want you to learn in the end. Did you feel- so compared to your L1; Did you feel like your L2, most likely was learned, was more acquired and/or learned? So did you feel whenever you were learning your second language, did you feel it came more naturally to you? Or did you feel it came more of your- more learning and like focusing on it, similar to that of like a high school or college learning experience?

- Fawn Printz

I think this is actually kind of really interesting and kind-of a tricky question. I think the obvious answer is, you know, your L2 definitely is learned. In certain circumstances it can be acquired, for most of us, especially if you learn in high school or college, you know, it's definitely a learned experience. But I think with any language, no matter what point you're

learning; farther that you get and the more that you strive for fluency, it does become- or start to become acquired. Because you know, if you really- to really learn a language; you have to kind of involve yourself in it, and involve yourself in that kind of environment. And at that point, I do think that you start acquiring parts of the language that you aren't really actively studying and learning. With French, I didn't go very far with that. I only took, I think a year which is the equivalent of one college semester, but with Japanese I've been speaking it for five years. And I feel like, I'm pretty fluent now. And I say that a lot of my fluency comes from enveloping myself in Japanese media, and reading in Japanese, and like listening to Japanese podcasts and movies and and stuff like that. And so I feel like I've definitely learned more from from acquiring it from- from those sources; but you have to go through like a learning period first.

- Skyla Matteson

I definitely get where you're going. Because that's how I feel, at times, with American Sign Language. Sometimes I don't, I guess, whenever it comes to your learning experience, sometimes you have to think back to that specific moment like, "Oh, like what did I learn in class? Like maybe like last week, recall your thoughts." And this might be like a better example of like, explaining acquired, comes naturally to you. So like, I might be able to, like have a full on conversation with someone and be like, "Oh, crap, oh, I accidentally gave you the wrong sign." And they're like, "like, no problem. Like you did good. You did better than some other signers." But if I was like a more of like, a learner's mindset, instead of like an acquired; which is-. If it didn't like come naturally, and I was more in a learning mindset, I would have had more hesitation and errors, because I wanted it to like make sure it was like perfected. To make it more, compared to the L1, it's my L1 of English, it's like more natural to me. But whenever it comes to similar to your experience with like, Japanese; if I'm immersed with American Sign Language, it comes more acquired than actually, like learned, depending on my immersion of the language. As well as if I'm using it; because I feel like if I did not use it, like say within, like two years from now, I might know some like basic, "Hello, how are you?". And that's it, I wouldn't be able to, like really carry on a full conversation.

- Susan

Yeah, I think like you guys said, immersion is very important. I think-well, my experience is very different. Because I learned my second language at a young age. And my second language is both of yours, first language. It's like, but it's also because I have grown up in a country that speaks English, at school and at work. So I've immersed myself a lot within my second language, that I've been able to easily express myself in a way it's like not difficult, and I've acquired it while growing up.

- Skyla Matteson

Didn't you say in a prior podcast; that whenever it came to your acquisition of English that it helped that your siblings had already, acquired a majority of English prior?

- Susan

Yeah, my-my siblings, they're older than me. So they- they've gone off to school and stuff. At home yeah, we would speak Spanish, but to each other we would speak English. I think that was also helpful in practice, and of course at school and then like with friends, neighbors, a very big immersion of English language.

- Skyla Matteson

Rather than compared to the environment that you were in like a good majority of the time Spanish speaking.

- Susan

Yeah, maybe it's because I was young-, I don't really remember when I became fluent in English. I also think it was easier for me to learn at a young age, than if I were to learn now. But also the learning style is very difficult one because it's a tonal language, which is completely different from the languages that I do know. And learning a tonal language is just like completely different. And also I'm not as immersed in the Thai language I mean, like in surrounded by people who speak Thai, as often as I was when I was young, surrounded by people who spoke English.

- Skyla Matteson

Language acquisition in general, um- which language did you have more difficulty with as like time went on?

- Fawn Printz

So I feel like, when I first- when you first asked me that question, I feel like I was- it felt almost kind of like instinctual to say that my L2 was harder. You know, for obvious reasons. It's something that I had to learn and pick up and it wasn't something that just came naturally to me. The more that I think about it, I'm going to have to say that my L1 gave me more difficulties. Because when I started studying linguistics, and I started having to learn syntax, and phonetics and all of the things that go into speaking English or speaking; you know, any language. I learned that I didn't know why I said the things that I said, I had to, like almost re-teach myself. I don't want to say re-teach myself English. But that's kind of how it felt, because they were asking me questions about my native tongue that I should know so well, but I didn't know how to answer it. Because it was just something that was so natural to me at that point, that I didn't even know why I was doing it. So-

- Skyla Matteson

I understand especially with syntax, they present you with like certain word groups on like, how to group this like, certainly word and then they present to you multiple phrases. And there's even like points to where you're creating a tree naming like all of the word classes that these certain words are, and you start questioning yourself. Whenever it came to like my L1, which is also English, I think I mainly had great difficulty. My junior year of high school, it was mainly ACT time, my teacher was a little bit of a stickler whenever it came, making sure that our sentence structure was perfect. It's not like I've known this language forever.

- Fawn Printz

Personally, I feel like I could give somebody a better explanation and a better like rundown of Japanese grammar than I ever could with English grammar. And I think that's just because I had to, like consciously learn Japanese from the ground up. But with English, you know, I just I just learned, you know, I just had to it was for survival. It was either learn to speak this the way that everybody else does, or have society just like rain down on you. It was so yeah, I definitely feel like my L1 was-was the problem child in the group.

- Susan

It looks so interesting to me, because every time I've learned a new language, I've-I've heard that a lot like, it just came naturally to me. Especially when I was learning Thai and the different tones that you have to do. High tones, low tones, middle tones, like rising tones, all those all those different tones. And my teacher would be telling us how to pronounce a specific word. And we would be like, we're-we're saying exactly how you're trying to teach us but-but; she's like, "No, you're supposed to rise. And she would say it again. And we'd be like, no, we need help with the tones. And she would just say, yeah, it comes naturally to me" and the assistant teachers, they would also be like, "Yeah, it's like, we don't really think about the tones because it's just a natural thing that we grow up doing. But to teach it is very difficult, because it's not something we've ever really thought about."

- Skyla Matteson

If I remember vaguely, I have not personally learned or attempted to learn any tonal languages. They just sound difficult. I'm sorry- I'm sorry. I guess like they would tone, tone, tone. And it's you drawing mountains with your fingers, I guess like visually demonstrating like your voice dropping, or if it's like, since we are having only audio, your heartbeat on a monitor having like a bland tone like tone, it would basically be someone flatlining. And if there's like a little bit- of like a heartbeat like tone, then there would be like an uprise. But tone would be like tone, it would kind of, I guess fluctuate? Is that similar? Or am I veering off track somewhere into a far distant land?

- Susan

No, yeah, it makes sense. It's like I-I every time I speak Thai, I use my fingers to like visually try to make my voice go up and down, not rise or all those different things. I understand.

- Skyla Matteson

So what is your- what is your thoughts on the critical period and the critical period; man named Lenneberg came up with the idea of the critical period hypothesis. The critical period is kind of like the timeframe from- from birth to the age of 13. When learning something your mind is like able to like easily like grasp onto it, but after like the age of 13, or after, like the time of puberty can't grasp onto it. So I was wondering what your thoughts were on Lenneberg's like critical period hypothesis? Lenneberg is basically saying we can't really like obtain much of like anything after the age of 13. If we do it, you'd have to put a lot of effort towards it. So I was kind of wondering what your thoughts were on the critical period?

- Fawn Printz

Yeah, I actually really like talking about this; so I'm glad that there was a question involved. I think that a big, big reason that younger people, especially, you know specifically babies acquire language or their L1; so naturally and even other languages is because, you know, they have to learn to speak for a matter of survival, you know. If they don't learn to speak, then they can never portray what they want, they can never communicate and communication is such a huge part of our culture, in our beings. I don't think that-that's to say, if you drop an adult person in a country where they don't speak their L1; I- you know, I think that they would pick up the language of that country pretty quickly, so that they could survive for the same reason. So I don't want to say that the critical period isn't true, because it is easier for kids to pick up, you know, multiple languages and aspects of multiple languages. But you know, I think that for the same reason, if you put a person in an environment where they don't know the language; I think that it would be fairly easy for them to pick up said language. And I think that they would obtain it pretty quickly.

- Susan

I like to agree with Fawn, mostly, because I think it's in my parents experience similar to the example she gave. Like they-they were in their 20s, when they came to the United States, and they only spoke Spanish. But in order to make money, and get a job, and get around and do all those things; they had to immerse, they had to like learn this language that everybody was speaking. They learned pretty quickly how to- how to learn a new language that wasn't their native language, because you know they had to make money and survive and eat.

- Skyla Matteson

Very good points. I give an example the critical period can be flexible, but sometimes, especially with how our brains work, critical period can just be a load of crap at times. It can be beneficial, but also like if we're trying to like grasp onto like as many- as much information as we can up until around like the age of 13. Some of the stuff, that I guess we're calling like back. Like not like with just like language but like with other subjects, sometimes like I didn't really like really grasp onto it, so like there wasn't really much like seriousness placed into it, to like actually acquire it or um- it wasn't like repetitive compared to like how English was. Because English was like the language that I was surrounded with, but say if it was like an other another subject like science or math, I might not have like grasp onto it. The critical period can be, I'm a little bit hesitant on the critical period, as it can-I can understand the thought-the thought of being able to grasp as much information as you can until around the age of 13. But there's also I believe, it's been said that our brains stopped growing at like the age of 25; so if effort is made in that like Krashen's Affective Filter, like if I was placing like all seriousness into that certain topic, I feel like I would be able to be like successful. Similar to that of the situation that Fawn provided with saying,if I was dropped off in a country that I did not know, I would have to have the motivation or like goal I guess like place responsibility onto myself. To learn the language rather than if I was like younger and I was just placed there. I'm gonna try my best.

- Fawn Printz

I think it also comes down to, what you consider to be fluent or what makes a person bilingual. I mean, an adult if you-you know, in my hypothetical scenario, if you drop them off in a country they'll learn all the words and they'll learn their grammatical structures and they'll learn tones and they'll learn all of those things; but there's going to be aspects that they can't pick up because they are out of the critical period. You know, their mouth might not be able to move in the way that the native speakers mouths move, so I mean if-if someone considers speaking exactly like a native person other than like grammatically or via vocabulary then yeah, maybe but I think it just depends on what you consider fluent.

- Skyla Matteson

I think I was like mainly like referring to like obtain ability like which just like anything whenever-whenver it comes to the critical period, but with language I think or like with my own experience that if a language was applied, how it was with my L1 then maybe I would have been able to like grasp onto it. But I think whenever it comes to like actually like learning a language, I feel more confident knowing that L1 learners or L one speakers have that spoken or signed language has like taught me. Their L1 is kind of like transferring on to me just like not fully, to like help a build with my fluency but I'm not fully for sure on how the critical period; I feel like the critical period might create possibly like a delay within our like learning of a language or affect our brains in some way. But it's definitely a hypothesis that is definitely quite fashionable, but we also have a research classmate of mine within the practicum, reminded me about the Genie study. And how she was not she had barely obtained, Genie was barely socialized with; only to be fed maybe like once- once in a while, and that because of like her environmental factors and how she was treated that she, she basically had to start from scratch after the critical period that Lenneberg has like set for that hypothesis. But whenever I looked at- whenever I looked at an academic journal that I have within my literature review. It's not listed within the actual document that you guys have but the case of Genie correlates, but the case of Genie correlates with Lenneberg's critical period-period theory due to how Genie has undergone physical and psychological trauma that did not allow her to communicate. And Genie was not found until she was 13 years and nine months, which the critical period had already been considered to be ended. And that is because of her environmental factors, and what was done to her that at that time, she wasn't able to really have that experience of L1 compared to some- some other individuals or a decent amount of society, but was still able to be able to communicate, just was not able to like fully function within the fluency or comprehension of English. Do you have any thoughts about the Genie case?

- Fawn Printz

I think this is the first time that I've, I've had any contact with it. You're right on-on that I haven't heard much about it. I think that kind of ties into what we were what we were talking about earlier, right?

- Skyla Matteson

In regard to the effect of theory, with like, motivation and outside factors?

- Fawn Printz

Yeah.

- Skyla Matteson

Yeah, I think it does tie into it. Because in regard to case, she had someone to help motivate her to try and aim towards a form of fluency in Genies' case. But not actually being fluent just to be able to have some form of English production because with-with the effects that Genie has faced the Affective filter would have been like really high. And with the Affective filter, when it's like high there's not really much information like going on to the receiver. So I'll-I'll give like a little if you know, volleyball, which all of us know what volleyball is. It's saying the person who was teaching Genie English after the fact that when-whenver she was found. There were times that the person was basically hitting the ball; probably repeatedly at the net, while there were 50 volleyballs were hitting just the net; while some were actually hitting like over acrossed the net to Genie like she is able to receive the information.

- Fawn Printz

Mhmm.

- Skyla Matteson

There were probably times, that depending on I guess, like her emotional state and depending on I guess, like the state of the situation after she was found; the Affective Filter could have been a little bit lower. Especially since she was out of that situation. But that still doesn't really, I guess; like replace what she has been better at that it could still have been a factor. Thank you for your time.