

***Preprogrammed Behavior and the Compensation
System:
Two Sides of the Same Coin?
The Stakes are High in the Post-Colonial Pedagogic
'Game'***

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Résumé

En apprenant une langue, l'apprenant fait souvent montre qu'il répond à un stimulus. Ce dernier le guide à apprendre à bien optimiser ses chances pour survivre dans un contexte nouveau. Les programmes scolaires d'après l'Indépendance nous disent tout autre chose. En effet, avec l'introduction du système de compensation dans les universités, notre pédagogie a commencé à chanter d'autres refrains! Nous pensons que dans ce «jeu» pédagogique, les enjeux sont chers.

1. Introduction:

In the operation of learning, the student learns and internalizes knowledge, and which strategies does he adopt to achieve his learning. The undeniable belief is that such an operation requires from the learner to be intelligent, and it evenly requires a social exposition to the language he is learning and to the knowledge he wants to get, that is whether the operation of learning is only conscious or/and unconscious. The other unclad requirement is motivation or that driving force responsible of initiation, direction and vigor of the goal-directed behavior. In responding to the impulse of different stimuli, the learner engages into a preprogrammed *behavior* to enable himself to live in a world where such theoretical and

practical opportunities are now been equated with a ubiquitous compensation system. The latter, we take, has spoiled [and continues to] such a preprogrammed behavior!

In the present article, we will try to discuss the process of learning that our post-independence language policy offers – together with the compensation system that rendered learning so dreary! Until bold, resolute and quick solutions would be taken, we continue to advance the thought that in such a pedagogic “game”, the stakes remain high!

2. Preprogrammed Behavior

As an operational definition, preprogrammed behavior means whatever is built to us, whatever we build in our learners. Preprogrammed behavior or pre-learning (Ur.2001) can take the form of spontaneity –or reflexes; instincts; and later on habituation. Likewise, the student learns how to comprehend what he is about to do, what he does, or what he intends to do in the new environment in which he evolves and which shapes and will continue to shape his ‘ever new’ behavior for ‘ever new’ purposes, tasks and achievements. In other words, this preprogrammed behavior could take the form of scheme and novelty, reflex and spontaneity, and instincts and intuition.

With the production of scheme, in the Piagetian sense (Piaget.1972), that is a pattern of a concept or an idea, the subject, can be then free to make the necessary construction exchanges. Piaget sees that ‘the hallmark of cognitive development is a “construction of the new”, i.e. the newly acquired experience. In trying to specify more on the notion of the Piagetian scheme.

Such learning continues to heat debates among cognitive psychologists, and applied linguists. This is so because with every new generation of learners, new learning phenomena surface, and open up new debates. Our present work is inscribed in this line of thought for we have embarked to try in a tentative fashion to analyze and try to understand how learning takes place among a new category of learners: learners in a particular socio-cultural context and at a given period of time.

Some psychologists agree that we are born with a preprogrammed knowledge, namely the *reflex* or spontaneity. Such psychologists see that a reflex is an animal act, which does not require any cognitive effort from the individual. Reflex means that the learner becomes so prepared that he tends, or gives the impression that his responses are reflex-like. An example of this is when students raise their hands and erect their heads to show that they know the answer to the question posed. This change in behavior is directed and prompted by a change in the classroom environment. It is equal to giving learners *a ringing bell of some sort* to make sure that they follow and be attentive.

Such an innateness of looking for regularities prompts the learner's behavior to act 'without thinking, *that is*, 'without being prepared', or the spontaneity, the 'reflex' which pushes our learners towards expertness. In behaving likewise, the learner becomes an intelligent individual, (*intelligent* in the lay people's sense of the word) knowing how to take part actively in an intelligent (not meat-and-potatoes) conversation.

It is important to note that the external environment is essential to the learner for it represents the social framework for appropriate social interactional frameworks to grasp it in

vivo (cf. Labeled.1997). In other words, the learner also needs to be versed in the society at large to be able to identify himself with it, and to create his own idiosyncratic learning paradigms. If any problem arouses, he can consult his teacher for any necessary guidance or councils.

3. The Gardner's Stance: Collaborative Learning, Cognition and Attributers

It is so important to know how much our learners are motivated and how much they are not. As a matter of fact, Gardner's (1985) model the AMTB (the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) tends to test the desire to learn a language, the motivational intensity, and the attitudes towards learning the language (pp.177-84). It can be summarized as follows:

1. *Interest in foreign languages;*
2. *Attitudes towards learning a foreign language;*
3. *Motivational intensity and*
4. *Desire to learn the foreign language.*

To these tests items, learners can respond differently revealing the type of motivation they develop. To the first test item, the answer could to 'survive in a foreign country', to the second, is the sentiment that 'the language being learnt is great'; to the third, 'to make the necessary efforts to learn the foreign language'; and to the fourth is 'the desire to be fluent in that language'.

The rewards and incentives presented in the classroom affect positively the behavior of the learner which classroom observation has confirmed. Indeed, a 'classroom rewarding' in the form of a bonus mark – a reward, or simply a congratulation or a praising -an incentive, bring change in the learner's learning behavior. Of course, to avoid S-R behavior

type, it is advisable to avoid constant rewarding, especially to the same student, for instead of creating in him a behavior of learning, it is feared that he rather develops a behavior of expecting the reward and *thus* loses interest in learning *per se*. At any rate, a teacher with expertise knows when to play over the reward and when to play it down.

As an extension of what we said above, if we make the learner develop a cognitive learning behavior safe of any rigid behavioral reactions –as to seek only reward– then we are helping the learning develop his thinking. Developing such a thinking means that the learner develops a behavior which is regulated by a plan, a goal to attain for which he uses his schemas which he is expected to have developed throughout his learning experience since his early age on (cf. Weiner. 1986, and elsewhere).

The central interest in such an approach is that the learner is rather an active individual who searches for information, who asks question and who wants to know. As a result, such a learner is expected to develop an intrinsic motivation wherewith he internalizes the language he is learning, and he makes sense of what he is learning and why he is learning it. , and the other individuals with whom he is learning asking himself questions as:

1. *Why did I get a good mark?*
2. *Why did my mate get a good mark and not me?*
3. *Why did I succeed?*

These will enable the learner to explain or attribute his successes and/or his failures to his pluck, knowledge, interest, and even his luck. He also makes attribution (Attribution Theory) that his classmates are also smart, lucky; knowledgeable, and that in respect of this he learns to engage

himself in an intellectual cognitive and meta-cognitive learning competition. Thus, success will lead to pride (external and internal locus) which will boost motivation even stronger, which in its turn will lead to further successes, as failure may decrease.

However, if he loses self-esteem and believes that he failed because he is unable, then *the lack of ability* will become uncontrollable. On the contrary, if the learner thinks that his failure is due to a lack of effort, he will think that he is responsible of this failure and that he can control it and engage in better performances in future to ensure success.

Participating in community practice motivates students to learn. If students realize that group work values learning, that they understand better through exchange of ideas, discover their weak and strong points, they will also like to learn with more appetite. The behavioral, cognitive, and socio-cultural approaches, each of these contributes in giving an understanding that motivation is humanistic which concerns learners as human beings having intellect they making plan, they make expectations. They will understand that they are not passive individuals receiving knowledge just as a trained chimpanzee would! But parallel to such considerations stands the compensation which, little by little is leads our cognitive learners to “to laze around in the university campus, becoming indefatigable bench-warmers!” (Labeled.1997). Indeed, when modules compensate each other, no one should expect learners to sweat to succeed!

4. The Minimax Loss Rule and the “Good Samaritan” Compensation System

Prior to 1983, the grading and passing system in our universities was that the students should secure 10/20 in every

module to succeed and move to the following academic year, which was commonly known then as *système modulaire*. Being essentially difficult, such a system caused many students to become repeaters overcrowding groups. As a second consequence, it caused the dormitory to be always crowded by both repeaters and the [new] freshmen. In all probability, and because of such problems, and maybe because of others, a new system, namely the *compensation system* was introduced to guarantee to students to pass somehow easily through the different academic years. Moreover, a 4-year, instead of a 3-year curriculum was introduced to balance out any difference between the other streams which always had a 4-year curriculum, which correlates in no way with the introduction of the compensation system.

It is important to note that on the terrain the introduction of the compensation system did not bring any visible betterment in students' achievements. The argument is that a striving few only continue to work hard, not really counting on such a system to pass from one year to another (although it works for them). To the others, the least-effort learners, the compensation system is *Samaritan system: they work just a little and they pass!* Nonetheless, such [now] lazy learners continue to add their names to the long swelling list of repeaters! The other argument is that the dormitories are always overcrowded *basically* because of such repeaters. The introduction of such a system has added nothing novel to the university.

Thus, as teachers, our other objective is to try to see how we could possibly reframe in the minds of our learners the concepts of 'learning' and 'thinking' -which are central in the operation of learning, and to foster their desire and motivation to learn -with the *expectation* of the occurrence of 'an

explosion of concepts' (Hawkins.1984). Vexing enough, our classroom observation and monitoring led us to contend that our learners seem not to be ready or able to expect such an 'explosion' to occur, afraid to kick open an anthill (Honey.1998). Many of them even after they graduate, are incapable of writing a good essay! With time, we can observe that the compensation system is so diluted in the students' minds that it reverberates so insidiously on their cognitive and affective factors.

The old saying that "the sage knows what he does and that the idiot says what he knows" fuels our purport that preprogrammed behavior has to do with cognition and metacognition, with the development of thinking and of learning and learning to learn by the student. They learn how to manipulate the "minimax loss rule". Indeed, being cognitive persons, they will know how to maximize their gain, or maximize the minimum gain, or minimize the maximum loss (cf. Sternberg. 1995 and elsewhere).

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning that in the course of how things have evolved, and especially with the application of the European-tailored LMD system, i.e.; it suits Europe but not us- the compensation system is maintained. Worse, the decision-makers have also dropped *la note éliminatoire!* Moving from one year to another has become, in our view, monkey business!! The stakes in the pedagogic games get higher!!

5. Conclusion:

First and foremost, no language policy, we think, will have its practical implications only if we consider the type of thinking, awareness and motivation for learning our students

must develop in their tertiary tuition while they carry on with their foreign language studies.

Furthermore, it would certainly be difficult and even heartbreaking to try to convince ourselves that pre-programmed behavior and the compensation system could be the two faces of the same coin. The two are rather two faces of two different coins! Indeed, this has made of the compensation system a highly complex phenomenon to be circumscribed by a researcher who would conduct an experiment and treat it as an independent variable! (Labeled. 2007).

In the present article, we address the highest levels of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. However, and for lengthy bureaucratic hindrances, such a request might not be taken into consideration as swiftly as we would wish; therefore some work at the level of the classroom should be carefully anticipated.

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