

The Good Language Learner Revisited: A Case Study

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Abstract—This study sought to explore, through a case study, the notion of the Good Language Learner in an attempt to identify the key prerequisites for effective second language learning. Data were gathered from an interview with a successful, polyglot second language learner with the aim of gaining an understanding of the approaches, strategies and activities he adopted and utilised as an effective language learner. Analysis of the interview data showed that the subject of the case study exhibited many of the characteristics of the hypothetical Good Language Learner identified from a review of relevant literature. The conclusion is that when learners accept responsibility for their language learning and actively engage in language learning activities, they have a much greater chance of success in second language acquisition.

Index Terms—second language acquisition, second language learning, second language learner, the Good Language Learner

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the major and continuing issues in language studies has been the need to develop a profound understanding of how languages are acquired and, in particular, how second language acquisition occurs. While many people have attempted to learn a language other than their mother tongue, there appear to be varying degrees of success in achieving a high level of proficiency in a second language. Investigations into successful second language learners have provided useful insights into possible prerequisites for effective language learning. Early work by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) led the way for an expansion of literature on second language acquisition such as that by Skehan, (1989), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Oxford (1990), and the considerable body of work by Ellis (1985; 1992; 1997; 2008). More recently, the literature has been expanded further (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Griffiths, 2008; Eckman *et.al.*, 2010; Hinkel, 2011; Mitchell *et.al.*, 2013; Ortega, 2013) to provide even greater insight into second language acquisition and notions of the Good Language Learner.

The purpose of this paper is to ascertain the major characteristics of the Good Language Learner by (1) reviewing some literature related to learner variables; (2) providing a case study of an effective language learner; and (3) comparing the information acquired from the case study with a hypothetical Good Language Learner. Firstly, key factors determining language learning performance will be discussed with reference to relevant literature. Secondly, a model of a Good Language Learner will be drawn from that discussion. Thirdly, a case study of a language learner will be presented. Fourthly, a comparative analysis will be made between the model of a Good Language Learner and the subject of the case study. Finally, conclusions about the Good Language Learner will be drawn.

II. KEY FACTORS DETERMINING LANGUAGE LEARNING PERFORMANCE

Although the term 'individual differences' is often used in the literature (Skehan, 1989; Dornyei, 2009), it appears that most of the research on second language acquisition is focused on similarities between individual learners in the hope that these similarities can be analysed and codified into a scheme of learner training. However, the search for a good second language learning style, like that of other learner factors, is problematic. There appears to be little agreement about what it consists of and, consequently, no agreement about how it should be identified and measured. The purpose in understanding what makes a Good Language Learner is, ultimately, to identify personality traits and strategy use that can be conveyed to, and developed in, language learners through learner training programmes.

Several decades of scholarship on second language acquisition has established that setting, aptitude, motivation, personality and effective use of strategies are all factors determining the degree of language learning success. This body of knowledge has provided a set of criteria which can be matched to the Good Language Learner. To understand how these criteria were derived, it is necessary to briefly review the key findings of research into second language learning and second language learners.

Setting

The learner's attitudes and motivations might be influenced by the social, political and linguistic context of the classroom (Naiman *et. al.*, 1995) and of the wider society. In particular, the classroom, and what goes on in it, might represent a different environment for the efficient (good) and the inefficient (poor) language learner. This is because each learner differs in the way he or she adapts to the de-contextualised learning situation (Skehan, 1989). Initially, the

Good Language Learner will conform to the demands of the classroom setting, but will later find ways of adapting or personalising it as he or she becomes more aware of suitable styles of language learning (Griffiths, 2008; Cook, 2013) and will develop his or her own learning style (Nel, 2008). This process occurs as the Good Language Learner analyses the language demands of the classroom, determines what language skills are required, and devises ways of acquiring the appropriate levels of skills needed to function successfully in that classroom (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Furthermore, the second language learner who not only learns in the formal setting of a classroom, but also in informal, non-classroom settings might devise his or her own rules on how the target language functions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Inside the classroom, the learner is usually taught the forms of the language. Outside the classroom, the learner communicates with others in a natural setting in which the language is learnt through functional use (Naiman *et.al.*, 1996). In this case, unlike in the classroom, there is less opportunity for preliminary organisation; therefore, the learner must be adept at imposing structure on linguistic input and output (Skehan, 1989). Hence, the Good Language Learner is one who attempts to use and build upon classroom language in external and informal settings.

Aptitude

Gardner and MacIntyre (1992) conclude that research "makes it clear that in the long run language aptitude is probably the single best predictor of achievement in a second language" (p.215). The two most commonly used aptitude tests, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery, (Dornyei, 2010) measure language learner characteristics such as, phonemic coding ability, grammar analysis ability, and memorisation ability. It is believed that possession of these abilities is essential for efficient and successful language learning (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006).

Aptitude and intelligence are inter-related, with language aptitude consisting of aspects of intelligence which are essential to language learning. In classrooms where communicative teaching takes precedence, research shows that learners with a wide variety of intellectual abilities become successful language learners (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). Indeed, Skehan (1989) argues that "aptitude is consistently the most successful predictor of language learning success" (p.38).

Motivation

Motivation in second language learning can broadly be defined in terms of three factors: (1) instrumental motivation, the communicative needs of the learner; (2) integrative motivation, the attitude the learner has towards the people and culture of the target language; and (3) intrinsic motivation, the interest the learner has in the learning process and the degree of success achieved.

Instrumental motivation is related to the purpose of language learning. The second language might be studied to pass an examination or to get a certain kind of job (Cook, 2013). In many second language learning contexts, for example EFL in mainstream schools, instrumental motivation would appear to be the major factor determining success. In such settings, learners are motivated by the need to achieve specific personal or educational goals rather than the desire to learn and use a second language. Moreover, when the learner's only reason for learning the second language is external pressure, attitude towards language learning might be negative (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006) and instrumental motivation minimal.

In contrast, integrative motivation is related to the degree to which the learner identifies with the people and culture associated with the second language being learnt. The learner who identifies positively with native speakers of the target language, who uses the second language in a wide range of situations, or who seeks to realise professional ambitions, will recognise the communicative value of the second language and will be motivated to become proficient in it (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). Therefore, when integrative motivation is high, the learner will seek situations to obtain further practice (Gardner, 1985). Gardner and Lambert (1972) conclude that:

'...an integrative and friendly outlook toward the other group whose language is being learned can differentially sensitise the learner to audio-lingual features of the language, making him more perceptive to forms of pronunciation and accent than is the case for a learner without this open and friendly disposition' (p.134).

Further, Schumann (1978) argues that when a learner fails to *acculturate* to the target language group due to an inability or unwillingness to adapt to another culture, pidginisation will occur. The degree of acculturation depends on the extent to which the learner achieves contact with native speakers and the culture of the target language.

Intrinsic motivation is related to "the arousal and maintenance of curiosity and can ebb and flow" (Ellis, 1997, p.76). Factors such as the particular interests of the learner and the extent to which he or she feels involved in the learning process affect levels of intrinsic motivation. In this case, the primary source of motivation is inherent interest in learning, and the degree of pleasure and satisfaction obtained from the learning situation. However, research suggests a circular cause and effect relationships (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006) between intrinsic motivation and success in second language learning. It is argued that the learner who enjoys learning and improves language skills experiences reward and is encouraged to try harder. Conversely, the learner who does not enjoy learning and who shows little or no improvement is discouraged by the lack of success. Therefore, "motivation would be a consequence rather than a cause of success" (Skehan, 1987, p.49).

Undoubtedly, motivation is a major factor in determining second language learning success. Nevertheless, it appears that many researchers view motivation as a static, unchanging phenomenon. On the contrary, motivation could change form one day to the next, affected by a wide range of factors including the mood of the learner, the teacher, the learning

materials, the learning environment, and even the time of year (Ellis, 1997). However, research has illustrated that a lack of any type of motivation, whether instrumental, integrative or intrinsic, results in failure to learn a second language.

Personality: Introversion and Extroversion

Many language teachers are convinced that the personality of a learner is a major factor in determining the level of success in second language learning (Ellis, 2008). Indeed, many teachers believe that extroverts will be the most successful second language learners since they interact without inhibition in the second language and find many opportunities to practise their language skills (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). This belief is supported by research (Naiman *et.al.*, 1995) which suggests that learners with sociable personalities are more inclined to talk, more likely to volunteer and to engage in practice activities in the classroom, and more likely to use the target language for communication outside the classroom (Skehan, 1989). Thus, it is argued, that by having the appropriate personality for second language learning, extroverts benefit both inside and outside the classroom because successful second language learning is best achieved by actual language use.

Use of Strategies

In the literature on second language learning, there is little consensus on the definition and classification of strategies, and there is some confusion over the distinction between general learning strategies and language learning strategies. Furthermore, there is little agreement on exactly what strategies are, how many strategies exist, and whether it is possible to create a scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies (Oxford, 1990). Nevertheless, it is important to understand what, in general, researchers have referred to when attempting to identify and discuss second language learning strategies.

Rubin (1975) defines strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p.43). This idea has been taken further by Oxford (1990) in her definition of learning strategies as "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information" (p.8). She expands on this definition by stating that language learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning the target language easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed and more effective, with the ultimate aim of making the language learnt transferable to a variety of situations (Oxford, 1990). However, learning strategies might refer to a general ability to take the initiative: or simply, an enthusiasm for learning (Willing, 1989). More recently, Cohen (2011) defines language learner strategies as thoughts and actions learners select to help them "learn and use language in general, and in the completion of specific language tasks" (p.682).

Second language learning involves active and dynamic mental processes that can be broadly grouped into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Metacognitive and cognitive strategies treat language learning like any other kind of learning. Such strategies might benefit academically-inclined learners who view language as a subject to be learnt, but might be less helpful to learners who want to use the language for communicative purposes (Cook, 2013).

Cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language. Such strategies include repetition, analysis and summary. However, the common function of cognitive strategies is the manipulation of the target language by the learner (Oxford, 1990). Understanding a second language is akin to a problem-solving task with knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and knowledge of the topic being brought together to construct meaning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). This capacity to make hypotheses about a language and be able to reconstruct language knowledge is an essential skill for effective language learners (Skehan, 1989). Therefore, the level of the learner's second language comprehension is commensurate with his or her interpretative capacities. The Good Language Learner is able to perceive recurring patterns in language learning problems and to use those patterns to solve language learning problems (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

The second language learner also utilises compensation strategies to use the target language despite limitations in his or her knowledge. In particular, he or she makes up for an inadequate range of grammar and vocabulary by using such strategies as guessing meaning and usage, asking questions, using synonyms, recombining and using common routines to help to develop discourse competence and strategic competence (Oxford, 1990) through real-world communicative interaction.

Language learning and language use depend greatly on memory, which itself relies on structured and idiomatic language. It has been suggested that the way in which information is stored in the memory is inextricably linked to language structure and meaning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Language is treated in memory just like other information and it is best learnt and retrieved by creating links with related meaning-based concepts, propositions, or schemata. This view implies that successful second language learning depends on the acquisition of, and control over, an increasingly larger range of language components, requiring a huge and complex retrieval system (Skehan, 1989). Although language learners seldom report using these memory strategies, they might simply be unaware of how frequently they do employ memory strategies (Oxford, 1990). This lack of awareness might be because the Good Language Learner proceduralises language skills through practice so that they become automatic and, thus, ease the burden on short-term memory (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Risk Taking

Risk taking is a major strategy that has been associated with effective second language learning. Rubin (1975) and Naiman *et.al.* (1995) identified a willingness to take risks as a characteristic of the Good Language Learner. It is believed the successful learner is able to judge the level of risk involved when using and testing hypotheses about the second language. By identifying medium-risk tasks with a considerable guarantee of success, the learner engages in cumulative learning: that is, learning from past risk taking experiences. Conversely, the unsuccessful second language learner lacks judgment in the level of risk and fails when the risk is too high or makes no progress when the risk is too low because the task is easily achievable. Thus, the medium-risk taker, who achieves success, is more likely to use risk taking as a method for developing understanding and improving use of the target language. Risk taking in communicative contexts allows the learner the opportunity not only for output through speaking and producing written language, but also to obtain input by listening to the target language (Skehan, 1989).

However, risk taking, as all of the strategies outlined above, might depend less on a learner's ability in the second language and more on the personality of the learner: for it is the learner's personality and cognitive style which result in a preference to learn in particular ways (Ellis, 1992). The arrangement and associations made of language factors must be meaningful to the learner, and the learning material must have personal significance (Oxford, 1990). The goal in language learning is to achieve a level of fluency at which learning strategies become automatic to the extent that the learner is no longer conscious that he or she is using them in communicative contexts. Therefore, the ways in which learners choose to utilise, combine, order or reject particular strategies is heavily dependent on the needs and preferences of the individual second language learner.

It is only by taking all of these factors into account together and comprehending their interaction, rather than as individual components, can an understanding of the Good Language Learner be reached. With this goal in mind, this paper will now turn to the identification of the Good Language Learner by highlighting the key characteristics which have been drawn from the preceding discussion.

III. THE HYPOTHETICAL GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER

As with any model, the hypothetical Good Language Learner presented here cannot fully represent a real second language learner because it necessarily cannot account for all the individual differences (Dornyei, 2009) and wide range of variables that affect each learner. Nevertheless, it serves as a point of orientation from which to view and assess the skills, the performance and the degree of success of the second language learner. The major characteristics of the hypothetical Good Language Learner are identified below.

1. The Good Language Learner possesses a strong reason for learning the second language. His or Her level of motivation, although open to fluctuation, remains sufficiently high to ensure continued second language development.

2. The Good Language Learner is actively involved in language learning. He or she responds positively to, and utilises learning opportunities, engages in a variety of practice activities, intensifies his or her efforts when necessary, and deals constructively with language learning problems. He or she responds to the learning situation in order to overcome negative anxiety and inhibitions about using the second language.

3. The Good Language Learner develops an understanding of language as a system and utilises it to analyse the target language, make effective cross-lingual comparisons and develop suitable learning techniques at different stages of language learning. He or she experiments with the second language and is prepared to take risks in order to achieve a reasonable level of communication.

4. The Good Language Learner develops an understanding of language as communication and utilises it in situations in which he or she can interact with others in the second language.

5. The Good Language Learner constantly revises his or her understanding and use of the second language. This revision is done by monitoring and testing the language already learnt and by making further adjustments as new material is learnt. He or she has effective analytical skills to perceive, categorise and store the features of the target language and also to monitor errors.

Having identified and described the key characteristics of the Good Language Learner, it follows that the hypothesis should be tested. Therefore, the focus of this paper must turn to a more specific presentation and discussion of a particular language learner who has been selected as a suitable subject for study on the basis of his ability as an effective and successful second language learner.

IV. A CASE STUDY OF A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER

The subject of this case study, who shall be referred to as 'Adam' throughout this paper, was asked a series of questions in a face-to-face interview to ascertain the extent to which he matched the characteristics of the hypothetical Good Language Learner presented above. Adam is a forty-one year old Malay Singaporean who was born and raised in Singapore, where he has lived his whole life.

Adam progressed "easily" through primary and secondary education. His attitude to school was always positive. He was interested in learning new things and attained excellent grades in all academic subjects. Studying was something he enjoyed, particularly reading and mathematics. However, in his youth he was unable to complete his tertiary education because financial problems within his family forced him to withdraw from a polytechnic engineering course in Year

Two. Upon leaving polytechnic, Adam fulfilled his National Service duty in the army and rose to the rank of sergeant within three years. Later, he spent a year working in a factory, followed by a year as a customer relations officer with a large retail chain. For the past 15 years, Adam has been a flight attendant with a major airline, and has received several awards for his performance on training courses. While working, Adam returned to academic studies as a part-time student, which culminated in him receiving a master's degree in 2008.

Adam's very early years were spent in a Malay-speaking neighbourhood, although at home both Malay and English were used. He reports that his early words were Malay, which he considers to be his mother tongue. However, English was the first language in which he received formal instruction, starting at age five. His family placed emphasis on English as it is the medium of instruction in the state education system in Singapore. In spite of studying English formally for fourteen years, Adam does not consider that he has finished learning the language, citing "more room for improvement in reading and understanding" as reasons for the continued, conscious development of his English language skills.

As a primary school pupil, Adam began learning the Chinese dialects Mandarin and Hokkien because he wanted to understand what other students in his class and people in his new neighbourhood were saying. Later, he took formal instruction in Bahasa Indonesia because it was closely related to his mother tongue and gave him a closer link with his ancestral roots. Adam took up the study of German language at the age of twenty-six because he felt he needed a new language and saw that his employers were expanding their business in Europe. Although Adam took a considerable loss of income to take a two-month, full-time, intensive German course in Singapore, he felt that the long-term financial and career benefits justified the immediate sacrifice. In 2002, he studied German in Berlin for two months, completing three courses of study that usually take six months to complete. In 2006, Adam spent another two-month period in Germany to take more German courses to prepare for German language examinations, which he passed with high marks. For the past several years, Adam has been part of a voluntary tutoring and mentoring scheme for German-language learners in Singapore. In addition, Adam has also studied French and Italian, which are also useful in his career. However, he states his focus is on the languages he needs to use most: English, Malay, Indonesian, German and Mandarin; but he practises his French and Italian whenever he has the opportunity to be in contact with users of these languages.

Adam provided evidence of his level of attainment and proficiency in his second languages by presenting his certificates for the language examinations he has taken over the years. When asked to rate his level current level of proficiency in his second languages, Adam responded that he had reached an advanced stage in all four skills in English and Bahasa Indonesia. He reported that his Mandarin and Hokkien were at an upper intermediate level for speaking and listening, while he was an intermediate reader and writer of Chinese characters. He rated his current level of German as upper intermediate in reading, writing and listening, but advanced in speaking. His current level of French and Italian proficiency he rated at intermediate for all four skills. When asked if he was fully satisfied with his proficiency in each of his second languages, Adam replied in the negative, with the exception of Bahasa Indonesia, stating that he wanted to improve his listening, reading and writing in his other languages.

Adam believes that "the textbook is more important than the teacher" because it offers "standard content". Teachers, on the other hand, vary in their methods and often "complicate things with explanations that don't match those in the book". He suggests that with a good textbook, a learner can follow a consistent format, which allows review as necessary, without resorting to a teacher for clarification. Adam reports that his language learning does not stop at the end of a lesson, but that the lesson is merely a starting point from which he begins his study of the aspect of the language that has been introduced.

Adam used English as a reference point from which to learn Mandarin, Hokkien, German, French and Italian, while he kept Malay and Bahasa Indonesia "separate". He felt that he "related other languages to English more easily than to Malay", in particular with regard to understanding grammar. For improving listening skills and learning the phonology of a language, Adam preferred to listen to and imitate native speakers. For grammar consolidation and vocabulary development, he designed his own charts and word-picture cue cards. These strategies enabled him to categorise and memorise structure and vocabulary and to practise them in real situations "in my own way in order to learn faster". Reading and writing strategies included reading children's books and writing short, simple essays in the target language. Speaking involved "practising with anyone who would talk with me".

In the early stages of learning a new language, Adam preferred to learn some vocabulary items, such as greetings and numbers, followed by simple grammar. When asked to explain his preference, Adam declared, "It's the right sequence. No point in learning grammar if you don't have any words to put together to make sense." In the intermediate stages, Adam believes that more grammar should be learnt because "once you have the basics, it's just natural to build more structure to what you want to say", and to consolidate the learner's understanding of the language structure. A wide range of reading materials, including literature, is preferred by Adam at the advanced stages of learning a second language in order to "develop a wider vocabulary and a deeper understanding of the whole language".

Anxiety about language learning was something Adam felt only at the initial stages of learning. This anxiety was primarily due to a fear of failure. However, such fears were overcome by "jumping in and just trying it", coupled with the determination to "do it right".

When asked if he thought it was important for a learner to have a positive attitude towards the people and culture of the target language, Adam responded in the affirmative, stating that such an attitude "helps you understand the language

better, helps you to grasp the concept of the language". However, when asked about his attitude to the people and cultures of his second languages, he responded by saying that "culture just doesn't interest me particularly. I'm just interested in learning the language, and knowing something about the culture comes with that".

Adam believed that having a "good ear" was important for language learning because "if people can't make out the sound properly, they can't say it correctly". The key to developing a "good ear", he said, was to pay attention to how native speakers sound and to make an effort to reproduce those sounds when speaking. Effort should also be made to reflect not only the sounds but also the structure of what was heard or read. Adam stated that reflection helped him to understand the language better and to realise what he was doing wrong.

Adam found that he became increasingly confident in his language learning as his skills develop. He felt it was essential for him to take control of his learning as soon as possible and believed that "once you reach the intermediate or advanced stages, you don't need any more formal guidance". He attributed his language learning success to his openness to criticism and positive attitude, and because he is "willing to explore and try new things with language". Furthermore, he believed that a combination of immersion, a course of study and close contact with native speakers are factors that have enabled him not only to learn, but also to retain and use his second languages. However, ultimately, Adam concluded that "the best way of learning is to absorb as much as you can in a short period of time, then you won't experience a lack of interest".

Adam would welcome the opportunity to learn another second language and would be willing to try whatever language he might be required to learn for his work. However, given a choice, he would choose to learn Spanish next because he sees good career prospects in his profession for someone who could communicate effectively in such a widely spoken language. His preference for learning would be a combination of immersion and intensive study in a Spanish-speaking country, followed by a long-term course and self-study once the basics have been learnt.

V. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE HYPOTHETICAL GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER AND THE CASE STUDY SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER

Attention must now turn to a discussion of the extent to which Adam matches the description of the hypothetical Good Language Learner as defined in this paper. The discussion will follow the order in which the characteristics of the hypothetical Good Language Learner were set out above.

1. *The Good Language Learner possesses a strong reason for learning the second language.* For each of his second languages, Adam has strong instrumental motivation to learn. His reasons for learning Mandarin and Hokkien were that he felt uncomfortable not knowing what others were saying. Adam saw English as a way of progressing within the education system, viewing fluency in English as a tool for academic, social and professional success. Similarly, proficiency in German, and later in French and Italian, was considered by Adam to be a further avenue to professional advancement and economic security. However, he felt no particular affinity with the people and culture associated with any of his second languages. Indeed, he expressed rather negative opinions towards some of them. He considered language learning to be a necessity of life and approached it as "another thing that has to be learnt". Adam was also driven by intrinsic motivation to succeed in meeting the learning challenge and to attain the status and recognition associated with being top of the class. The desire to succeed was itself sufficient motivation, accounting for Adam's drive and ability to learn a variety of languages. While Adam's integrative motivation was minimal, the fact that he possessed strong instrumental and intrinsic motivation indicates clearly that he did have strong reasons for learning his second languages.

2. *The Good Language Learner is actively involved in language learning.* Adam responds positively to learning experiences and fully utilises opportunities for language learning and practice. He subscribes to cable television channels which broadcast in each of his second languages and attempts to watch a variety of programmes on TV and via the Internet on a regular basis. His reading habits follow a similar pattern. Adam also uses short-text messages (SMS) to communicate with friends and colleagues who are native users of his second languages. He finds the informality of the written SMS form to be ideal for immediate communication. However, he noted that when he sends an SMS in German, French or Italian, he is "more conscious of getting the grammar right" than when using this medium in English or Bahasa Indonesia. This habit indicates that Adam deals constructively with his language learning problems by making an effort to produce correct output, particularly in the languages that he has more recently acquired. Furthermore, Adam puts a great amount of effort into ensuring himself success in formal examinations of his second languages. In this regard, he treats language learning not simply as skill, but rather as an academic exercise.

3. *The Good Language Learner develops an understanding of language as a system.* Adam makes effective cross-lingual comparisons by using English as a base from which to comprehend the structure of other languages. To do this, he visualises the grammar by reviewing self-made cue cards. He reported that he was better able to construct grammatically correct output when visualising the images presented on the cards. He also utilised cards to memorise new vocabulary, often including target items in a phrase or sentence: thus, providing meaningful context, which he would later be able to recall to produce in an appropriate situation. Adam believed that the development of these learning strategies helped him to focus on "the right things to learn" for his needs as a user of the target language.

4. *The Good Language Learner develops an understanding of language as communication.* Adam has had ample opportunity to use his second languages both socially and professionally. He has been able to use Mandarin and

Hokkien on a daily basis for much of his life because he lives in a multilingual and multicultural society in Singapore. However, constant exposure to other languages does not necessarily lead to second language acquisition. Nevertheless, Adam's effort to interact with Mandarin and Hokkien speakers has enabled him to reach his current level of proficiency. Similarly, the use of English as the *lingua franca* in Singapore has provided Adam with an abundance of opportunities for a wide range of both input and output in English in academic, social and professional contexts. Being a flight attendant has given Adam the exposure to international varieties of Mandarin (China, Taiwan and Singapore), English (Britain, North America, Australasia, South Africa, the Indian sub-continent, Singapore and Malaysia), German (Germany, Austria and Switzerland). This wealth of linguistic experience has enabled Adam not only to use his second languages in real, meaningful communicative interaction, but also to take note of, and allow for, phonological variations within those languages. In addition, Adam's professional need to communicate with passengers, ancillary personnel and hotel staff in international contexts has motivated him to develop a linguistic repertoire with which to project his identity, regardless of the context in which he might find himself.

5. *The Good Language Learner constantly revises his or her understanding and use of the second language.* Adam has a positive attitude to learning and reported that he rarely viewed correction of his output by others as criticism of his performance. Having a willingness to change and adapt to new aspects of a second language was, he believed, the key to his ability to learn languages. Although he felt that a "trial and error" approach was not very productive, he did make attempts to test certain hypotheses about language when he felt confidence in his convictions. When he had serious problems in understanding, particularly with new grammar, he preferred to study "what it said in the book" and analyse the description or prescription more closely. This approach involved doing writing activities in which he tested his understanding and checked it against the structures presented in the textbook. Thus, while Adam was not averse to making errors in the attempt to use the target language, he did monitor closely the types of error he allowed himself to make. He regarded mispronunciation and inadequate vocabulary as less serious problems than grammatical errors. He had no particular objection to being corrected on his phonological and lexical skills: indeed, he welcomed such advice; but he felt a sense of embarrassment when he had not used a particular structure correctly. The reason Adam gave for this embarrassment was that he felt speech and vocabulary were a matter of practice, whereas comprehension of grammar was an intellectual matter.

The analysis presented above has shown that Adam is actively involved in developing his second language skills and has devised a combination of strategies, which have allowed him the independence necessary for good language learning. His repertoire of strategies and systematic approach to language learning problems enabled him to overcome initial anxiety and to become more aware of himself as a learner of the languages being learnt; thus, motivating himself to advance still further in his pursuit of second language learning success.

VI. CONCLUSION

The characteristics of any language learner will vary, among other things, according to language learning objectives, educational and cultural background, personality and previous language learning experience (Willing, 1989). Indeed, since each learner is unique, Naiman *et. al.* (1995) concludes "the successful or good language learner, with predetermined overall characteristics does not exist" (p.224). Nevertheless, based on the evidence provided both by the literature discussed and the case study presented in this paper, several key characteristics of the Good Language Learner have emerged. For effective second language learning, it appears that the learner needs to (1) possess a positive attitude towards learning and practising; (2) deal positively with the demands of learning a second language; (3) understand the language as a system; (4) monitor his or her own language development; and (5) use the language communicatively whenever possible. To this extent, it would appear that the case study shows that Adam is a Good Language Learner, in that he meets many of the requirements and exhibits many of the habits necessary for good language learning. However, it could be argued that Adam is an exceptional language learner in that he is highly motivated and has had ample opportunity to practise his second languages through interaction with native users of those languages. While it is true that some learners might be highly motivated, not all are in a position to interact with native users of their target languages. Adam, then, takes full advantage of the opportunities he has to use his second languages and is motivated to gain maximum language learning benefit from those opportunities because he is a motivated language learner. Clearly, Adam is the master and director of his own language learning because he recognises the responsibility he must take for his own performance and progress in learning a second language. It is this responsibility that is essential for the Good Language Learner.

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