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Book review: Learning new languages. A guide to a second language acquisition

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Scovel, T. (2001). *Learning New Languages. A guide to a second language acquisition.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

With a title related to its content, *Learning New Languages. A guide to a Second Language Acquisition* is a book specifically designed for persons who are trying to learn about the way a second language is acquired, the only condition is that the person has a good command of the language, intermediate to advanced level and knows the terminology that the author uses constantly. It is easy for teachers of English as a second or foreign language to handle it.

The text is based on the author's argument in which he presents 5 big domains or contexts in where we acquire the language. For Tom Scovel, those five domains are: people, language, attention, cognition, and emotions, chapters from two to six. Even though he uses easy terminology about the teaching field, there are abbreviations, names of methods, techniques and approaches which we will need to know for an absolute comprehension of the ideas.

Scovel not only gives us his point of view based on his wide experience as a teacher, but he amplifies this vision incorporating testimonies from teachers and students to clarify his proposal.

In chapter 2, *People*, he introduces us to socio-cultural aspects that are crucial factors that play an important role not only for learning new languages but for the whole person's behavioral patterns. In this chapter he mentions some sociolinguistic problems such as language transition due to the mix of cultures, what causes relevant changes in a language. He presents immigration as the cause for creating changes in words and letters, and as a consequence the emergence of a new way of communication and lifestyle.

In chapter 3, *Languages*, he focuses on how the mother language (L1) influences in the second language (L2) acquisition, referring to a recent research on language interference when learning a language, which confirms that the student learns or acquires his or her second language based on the grammatical structures of his or her first language, making difficult to give a logical explanation for that language mixing that is found in less proportion when the person is exposed to the second language for a long time.

In chapter 4, *Attention*, he refers to the teacher's action when he raises his voice to request attention from the students, either to mention something important, in that moment, students must center their attention and try to follow the teacher's instructions. However, there are some students with attention problems, with psychological, neurological and/or physical problems derived from this situation which is considered vital in the language learning.

Cognition, as chapter 5, refers to the relevance of the students' previous knowledge. It is considered a tool for teachers to know what this previous knowledge is for planning and incorporating the appropriate methods. This will help with problems related to second language acquisition such as excessive word or sentence repetition or the incorrect use of grammatical items.

Emotion is the sixth chapter and it is close related to cognition because these domains function simultaneously. One can not function without the other. Learning a language is determined somehow by the affection domain, the motivation, anxiety and empathy, same as introversion and extroversion that are

key factors in this type of learning; however, there is a an important factor in the emotions of a person which is considered vital for a person to do any activity and complete it successfully, self-esteem, which could determine whether a language is learned or not.

In the last chapter, the author summarizes everything he mentioned throughout the book in the chapters mentioned before. We must also state that the author frequently includes a series of metaphors at the beginning of the chapters and the introduction, that are difficult to understand specially for a person who is not a native speaker or that his first language is not English.

It is a brief book but at the same time involves wide aspects in its field. As I mentioned the author has a lot of experience as a teacher, He has been teaching English as a foreign language and second language for 20 years. The information is useful and we must highlight that language acquisition is beyond grammar structures and textbooks and it is also determined by socio-cultural, psychological and physical factors, either internal or external. It is one of the most complex processes in a person, which involves a lot of aspects. For some people, to learn one or some languages could be easy, while for others could be almost impossible.