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AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights learner autonomy in language learning. Indeed, the learner is only autonomous if he is first competent. For this, Linguistic skills cover all the skills to express oneself in one's mother tongue or in a foreign language. They are grouped according to the major verbal functions reading, writing, speaking, listening. It is these four capacities that enable an individual to understand, produce and use language in effective communication. They are most often acquired in the order of listening first, then speaking, then eventually reading and writing. The mastery of these capacities confers on the learner the autonomy of learning which makes him capable of taking charge of his own learning. However, in formal language learning, the scope of learner autonomy is always limited. To overcome this limitation, the teacher should, among other things, involve his learners in a non-stop quest for good learning activities, which are shared, discussed, analyzed and evaluated with the whole class in the target language, help his learners to define their own learning objectives and to choose their own learning activities, subjecting them to discussion, analysis and evaluation again in the target language; and lead its learners to identify individual goals while pursuing them through collaborative work in small groups.

KEYWORDS: Autonomy, competence, learning, languages.

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INTRODUCTION

Autonomy is the possibility of governing oneself, by one's own laws and, by extension, recognizing this right of others. According to the glossary-teaching-learning-of-languages, autonomy translates to educate. It is to make autonomous, that is to say, to bring the student to do without the teacher. In a foreign language, we do not really make autonomous, we make more and more autonomous. In the field of expression, becoming autonomous means reducing the gap between wanting to say and being able to say. According to Coq and Gruca (1994: 118) in the dictionary of didactics, the term autonomy refers to the learner's ability to take charge of his learning. In a second meaning, the term autonomy is sometimes used in reference to learning. Furthermore, in the phrases linguistic autonomy, linguistic autonomy, communicative autonomy, the term autonomy refers to the ability to cope, in real time and in a satisfactory manner, with the language obligations that one is confronted with in communication situations. Thus, according to Arenilla et al. (1996: 6) in Dictionnaire de pédagogie, the term autonomy designates the ability to regulate one's behavior by oneself according to laws. The conquest of autonomy would therefore be the awareness of the laws and the integration of these laws in a personal future, dialectical between freedom and constraint.

Intellectual autonomy is defined as the ability to read, write, use the documents or the current instruments of the work required. In addition, Holéc (1997) defines autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. According to him, taking charge of one's learning means taking responsibility for various decisions concerning all aspects of learning: the determination of objectives, the definition of content, the selection of methods of achievement and evaluation. The same applies to the definition of autonomy given by Germain and Netten (2004: 69), which makes the learner responsible for learning. Thus, the autonomous learner understands the purpose of his learning program, explicitly accepts responsibility for his learning, participates in the development of his learning goals, takes the initiative to plan and carry out learning activities, learning, and regularly reviews their learning and evaluates its effects. This definition is similar to that of Dickinson (1987: 17) who translates the notion of autonomy as being the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for the decisions concerning his learning and for the execution of the decisions. In language teaching, the notion of autonomy as taken up by the CEFR falls within the field of language learning and learning in itself is a skill. Thus, autonomy means placing the learner at the center of his learning. In the specific context of learning a language, autonomy is therefore a set of skills for the learner to take charge of his own learning. But since these skills are not innate, the teacher, who now plays the role of adviser, will have to help the learner to learn how to learn. Hence the need for the teacher to help the learner to determine the objectives of his learning (specific, global, etc.), to identify the content of said learning (phonetic, phonological, morphophonological, lexicological, morphological, syntactic,

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stylistic, etc.), to determine the methods of learning, the modalities of learning and to retain the instruments for evaluating one's learning. It would be important to refer to school autonomy as defined by Raab (2016), in his article: Autonomous learning and obstacle avoidance strategies. According to Raab (2016: 23), school autonomy is the ability of a student, a group of students or a class to carry out a productive activity (the task) in the service of a constructive activity (the learning) outside the direct presence of the teacher. The autonomy of pupils is studied within the framework of so-called "autonomous" devices or activities, carried out in the space-time of a heterogeneous and large class: the pupil must act outside the direct presence of the teacher, in within the framework of work prescribed by the teacher or chosen from among the possible activities permitted by the framework or the device.

This definition of school autonomy comes here to reframe learning autonomy in its more restricted sense but by emphasizing the task that corresponds to what the learner has to do in the presence or not of the teacher. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR, 2001) is the culmination of a long process carried out at the initiative of the Council of Europe in order to establish a reference document (CEFR), as its name suggests, to set objectives, skill descriptors and tasks at each language proficiency level on which the user can base himself to learn, implement learning strategies, and evaluate the level of language learners. This work of the CEFR (2001: 15) is placed in an action perspective in the sense that it considers above all the user and the learner of a language as social actors having to accomplish tasks (which are not only linguistic) in given circumstances and environment, within a particular field of action. In the CEFR, the notion of autonomy is considered under two aspects: the autonomous level and the categorization of the notion of autonomy.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: The second section presents the level of language learning. The third section presents the categories of autonomy in learning, the fourth section presents the importance of autonomy in language learning and the fifth section is devoted to the conclusion.

Level of language learning autonomy

The autonomous level seems to be characterized by access to a wide range of speech that allows easy and spontaneous communication. The adjective autonomous derives from the noun autonomy, thus the CEFR has a two-sided conception of the notion of autonomy: learner autonomy in the use of language and learner autonomy in language use. language learning.





Learner autonomy in language use

The European Council (2001: 24) defines six reference levels: (i) the Introductory or Breakthrough Level corresponds to what Wilkins called formula competence in his 1978 proposal and Trim introductory competence in the same publication; (ii) The Intermediate or Survival Level (Waystage) reflects the content specification currently in force within the Council of Europe; (iii) the Threshold Level reflects the content specification currently in force within the Council of Europe; (iv) the Advanced (Vantage) or Independent User Level, above the Threshold Level, has been presented as a limited operational skill by Wilkins and by Trim as an appropriate response in common situations; (v) the Level of Autonomous or Effective Operational Proficiency, which has been presented by Trim as an effective skill and as an adequate operational skill by Wilkins, corresponds to an advanced level of proficiency suitable for carrying out more comprehensive tasks or studies; (vi) Mastery (Trim: global mastery; Wilkins: global operational competence) corresponds to the highest examination in the ALTE scale. This could include the even higher level of intercultural competence achieved by many language professionals. It is about the autonomy of the learner in his relationship with the language he is studying (language of learning) within the framework of the didactic triangle. The didactic triangle is a schematic representation of the didactic system. The didactic system, which appears in any mediation of knowledge between a teacher and a learner, is made up of the interrelations produced between the following three actors: knowledge (in this case school), the teacher and the learner.

Learner autonomy in language learning

From this point of view, the CEFR gives a certain number of advices as to the need to develop in the learner an awareness of his learning of the language, and to encourage his ability to learn independently, considering that most learners learn reactively, that is, without planning, structuring and executing their own learning operations as the few learners who would learn proactively do. According to the CEFR, this therefore presupposes training in autonomy. If autonomy is determined by the ability to take charge of one's learning by being oneself an actor in one's own initiatives or even to see the usefulness of what is to be done and to do the task well is requested. Thus talking about autonomy for the youngest, more specifically from SIL to CEI, must be a concern for the teacher to bring his learners to think and act in a thoughtful way first in class, at school, in the family and later in society. In language didactics, we distinguish three types of autonomy which deserve to be elucidated, namely general, language and learning autonomy.

Categorization of the concept of autonomy

The notion of autonomy implies the concept of independence in its primary sense. In this chapter, it is above all a question of school autonomy, which is considered here as the capacity of the





learner, of a group of learners or of a classroom to accomplish a task with the aim of increasing the lessons given by a teacher. The heterogeneity of the classroom is the place par excellence of expression in language autonomy. Autonomy is perceived from several angles: general autonomy, the notion of empowerment, the concept of learning to learn, the relationship between autonomy and metacognition.

General autonomy

The notion of general autonomy is a globalizing concept that takes into account the different elements that constitute autonomy by considering the social environment in which this autonomy takes place and the relationships with other types of autonomy. If we go into language didactics, we can generally observe autonomy in the learner which breaks down into seven (07) categories which are: language autonomy, learning autonomy, material autonomy, spatial autonomy, temporal autonomy, affective autonomy and socio-cultural autonomy.

Language autonomy

The study of language autonomy is found in a very specific context, namely: the context of language teaching/learning. To better illustrate our understanding of this concept, we drew inspiration from the article by Germain and Netten (2004) entitled Factors for the development of language autonomy in FLE/FLS. According to Germain and Netten (2004: 69), language autonomy is defined as the learner's ability to take language initiatives and to use new utterances spontaneously in an authentic situation of communication in the second language. This situation is in the context of learning a second language, considering that we already have a better command of the first language. However, the notion of linguistic autonomy can also be studied in a context of learning mother tongues for linguistic and cultural continuity in a school context because it is possible today to ensure literacy for any language if and only if it is codified and standardized. Indeed, the teaching/learning of knowledge rooted in local tradition and transmitted to learners orally and in writing expresses the durability of the linguistic and cultural heritage of a people.

Learning autonomy or learner autonomy

Learning autonomy is a concept specific to an educational environment. Talking about this notion amounts to taking into account the thought of Dahmen (1997) who suggests that: autonomy is the ability to take charge of oneself and, in the context of teaching, to take charge of one's learning. This assertion is reiterated by Holec (1997) in these terms: the ability to lead, actively and independently, language learning. These two thoughts highlight the contribution of learning autonomy in the development of the learner. The latter is in a learning context where he himself takes charge of his learning from the lessons received. Indeed, the teacher most often puts himself in a situation in order to promote the learning of the learner by facilitating the construction of his





knowledge. Thus, the learner receives the teachings, restructures them according to his own knowledge already integrated previously. Learners are thus encouraged to think and explain their reasoning. With regard to evaluation, learners are evaluated on their learning, in order to see the quality of their learning and primarily what they have retained. This experience lets us know that it is by building that we remember and learn. Indeed, with regard to learning autonomy, there are four aspects: physical learning autonomy; cognitive autonomy of learning; linguistic autonomy and social autonomy which can be listed in order to elucidate the notion of learning autonomy. Learning refers to a school context that consists of a teacher and learners, all of whom are in a given space. Teachers are guides and they guide learners in the appropriation of knowledge. Thus, physical autonomy refers to learners who dispense with the lessons of the master in favor of new information technologies (videos, CD-Room, tutorial, internet, etc.). These different elements play a major role because a learner can access a language course alone. Cognitive autonomy in learning is similar to intellectual autonomy that takes into account the knowledge held by the learner with a view to self-management. Thus, the learner has the ability to learn alone but having at his disposal all the information and all the techniques necessary for self-learning.

If we return to our study context, we find that in the learning of mother tongues, especially in rural areas, learners have a certain linguistic knowledge that takes into account intergenerational transmission, which is an important factor in the acquisition of learners' first language. Thus, the pre-acquired which are knowledge acquired previously help learners in a personal management of learning. However, these learners need the teacher for writing and reading the language they already master orally. The quality of mastery of one's mother tongue presupposes linguistic autonomy in learning. Thus, the different language skills or language activities that contribute to the autonomy of the language learner put the latter in the forefront of the linguistic objectives that he has set according to his communicational needs. If we make a comparison between learners in rural areas and those in urban areas, we find that the language level in the mother tongue of learners in small schools in rural areas exceeds that of learners in large schools in urban areas. This discrepancy is due to the rural environment which still seems conducive to the promotion of mother tongues despite the coexistence of other languages which require borrowings from both sides. The social autonomy of learning could be akin to self-affirmation in the eyes of others. This self-determination of language learners in a specific environment demonstrates the ability of each other to express their needs, their desires with ease and above all by showing politeness. In his book entitled Teaching and researching autonomy, Benson (2001) explains that the socio-cultural implications of autonomy inspired by the work of Vygotsky (1929) deserve to be taken into account. The research they present in his book clearly shows a predominance of classroom approaches that target a certain level of learner autonomy.





Material autonomy

Material autonomy in learning is the fact of knowing how to take care of one's school supplies on one's own and of trying not to forget one's didactic material at home. Always put everything in your school bag the night before before going to bed. It is important to think about his class outfit which falls under the heading of material autonomy. The learner must be able to put on their class uniform, socks and shoes on their own or undress themselves once at home.

Spatial autonomy

Spatial autonomy is part of the physical autonomy of learning and refers to the learning space. This space is undoubtedly the classroom where the lessons take place, the playground or the club in which the learner is registered. Thus, the learner must be able to successfully do the spatial identification alone and without the help of the teacher.

Temporal autonomy

The learning time rhymes with the timetable that the establishment draws up for the smooth running of the appropriation sessions. The time taken to complete a task given by the teacher to the learners should be taken into consideration, as well as the remediation time. This autonomy not only involves the timetable but also takes into account the internal regulations of the establishment, the annual educational project, the educational breakdown by sequence, by quarter and annually. This temporal distribution foresees what the learner is supposed to know and achieve according to his skills. Thus, the learner must become aware of the time he has to carry out his task in order to feel autonomous and responsible in the face of the notion of time.

Affective autonomy

In the context of learning mother tongues in primary school, affective autonomy makes us think of those learners who find it difficult to get rid of their parents for school. Parental dependence decreases as the learner agrees to socialize with other learners. Thus, the school becomes a place of fulfillment so that the learner who does not live far from the school goes there by himself and those who are accompanied by parents take care to get up early and urge parents to drive them to school. After affective learning autonomy, it remains to review socio-cultural autonomy.

Socio-cultural autonomy

The concept of socio-cultural autonomy is introduced here with the aim of highlighting an aspect of teaching/learning, namely the learning of national languages, which is one of the key elements of our research. Autonomy here is linked to the learner's relationship with his socio-cultural environment. The environment plays a crucial role in the cultural identity of a people. When it comes to learning a language, the learner needs an environment conducive to learning. If learners are permanently in contact with their environment, their attitudes and language activities will





contribute to developing the socio-cultural autonomy of learners. In order to consolidate the socio-cultural autonomy of the learners, emphasis must be placed on the school environment and the favorable conditions such as good teacher training, the availability of teaching materials in relation to the socio-cultural environment of the learners and the development of programs consistent with learner needs. In short, we believe that the African or even Cameroonian learner needs favorable conditions for the practice of the mother tongue he is learning. Thus, socio-cultural belonging is a considerable factor in the development of the socio-cultural autonomy of the learner, the absence of which can lead the learner to the inability to reflect the contribution of education in language and culture. national. In this logic, the development of the language autonomy of the learner passes by a centering of the teachings on the learner. In fact, learning a knowledge that originates in the depths of one's culture (tradition, oral literature, habits and customs) through one's mother tongue can only be commendable, especially in these times when the phenomenon of deculturation or even the loss of one's culture in favor of a Western culture that one does not control is topical.

The notion of empowerment

Empowerment is a process that integrates the autonomous learning activity of the learner and his gradual entry into a process of school empowerment. What prevents it and what promotes it. For Vygotski (1929), the child learns in a quasi-social way: autonomization results from a movement that goes from the interpsychic (interactions with adults and peers) to the intrapsychic (internalization of processes learned during social interaction). On the other hand, Little (1997) in the process of empowerment, insists on the role of the teacher which is to create an environment in which the learners take charge of their learning. In view of the above, empowerment is a process by which the learner goes beyond intuition and achieves reflection. In other words the learner goes beyond intuitive thinking to analytical thinking.

The concept of learning to learn or intellectual autonomy

The concept of learning to learn is a mode of learning whose condition is to first be autonomous and take charge of one's learning. It has its own specificities and specific means. Thus, the process by which the learner reflects on his own progress in knowledge, skills, processes and behavior, allows him to become aware of himself as a learner. Through these two particularities of the notion of learning to learn, we perceive a statutory condition that is not linked to another: it is the notion of independence and responsibility. This concept aims to increase an ability that can make a learner a person who knows how to learn. Learning to learn or intellectual autonomy is part of the general autonomy that learners need to take responsibility for their own learning.





The relationship between autonomy and metacognition

Metacognition is the representation that the learner has of the knowledge that he possesses and of the way in which he can build and use it, thus, materializes the learner's ability to reflect on his knowledge and to understand the reasoning that he has. engages to use and build new knowledge. According to Flavell (1976: 171), metacognition refers to the knowledge that one has of one's own cognitive processes, their products and everything that concerns, for example, the properties relevant for the learning of information and of data... Metacognition relates, among other things, to the active evaluation, regulation and organization of these processes according to the cognitive objectives or the data on which they relate, usually to serve a concrete goal or objective. Through this assertion, we note that metacognition is the knowledge of what the learner knows and can evaluate its quality, estimate the degree of certainty in the organization of a cognitive activity in a language task. Cognition occurs when the learner engages his thoughts on himself. Moreover, this reflective thought is capable of producing knowledge about his own knowledge (meta-knowledge) through a more or less important awareness and allows the learner to control the regulation of his activities. Indeed, if metacognition is inseparable from self-knowledge and self-confidence, talking about the relationship between metacognition and autonomy goes without saying because autonomy is also linked to self-esteem and self-image.

We will not be able to speak only of the notion of autonomy without mentioning the term motivation because to achieve any autonomy, it would be necessary to have given skills and above all to be motivated.

Importance of independent learning

Independent learning is a basic human need. This autonomy stems from our inner will (intrinsic motivation) and our proactive interest in the world around us. This explains how learner autonomy solves the problem of learner motivation: autonomous learners rely on their intrinsic motivation to take responsibility for their own learning and commit to developing skills in learning. Success in learning reinforces their intrinsic motivation. Precisely because autonomous learners are motivated and reflective learners, their learning is efficient and effective.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the independent learner means that knowledge and skills learned in the classroom can be applied to situations that occur outside of the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to assess the contribution of autonomy in language learning. Thus, this study has shown that autonomy helps to improve the level of language use, it helps to strengthen empowerment capacities as well as intellectual capacities in language learning. In formal





educational contexts, specifically in schools, learner autonomy requires reflective involvement in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of learning. But note that learning a language crucially depends on how it is used. We can indeed only learn to understand by listening, to speak only by speaking, to dialogue only by conversing, or even to read only by reading. However, in formal language learning, the scope of learner autonomy is always limited by what the learner can do in the target language. The teacher should: (i) use the target language as the preferred means of communication in class and ask the same of his learners; (ii) involve its learners in a non-stop quest for good learning activities, which are shared, discussed, analyzed and evaluated with the whole class in the target language; (iii) help its learners to define their own learning objectives and to choose their own learning activities, subjecting them to discussion, analysis and evaluation again in the target language; (iv) lead its learners to identify individual objectives while pursuing them through collaborative work in small groups; (v) encourage its learners to keep a written record of their learning; (vi) plan lessons and projects, lists of useful vocabulary, whatever texts they produce themselves; (vii) involve its learners in regular assessment of their progress as a learner in the target language.

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