Perceptions of Language Progress

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Overview

• Overall patterns
• Specific learner groups
• Implications
Overall patterns

- Most learners report that their English improves, but a lot also report it deteriorating after they leave the AMEP (see Learner comment 1);
- Language network data (smaller sample) indicates just over half report an increase in the time they spend using English (compared to other languages) over the year, one third report about the same proportion, one seventh report a decrease;
- What learners identify as their weaknesses at the beginning remain their perceived weaknesses in later data collection (see Learner comment 2);

Overall patterns

- If learners have prior experience of learning English in another country, this influences what they want out of the AMEP - they want what they now realise they didn’t get in their home countries (see Learner comment 3);
- Many learners report problems with Australian English, including accent, use of English and cultural factors. They weren’t ready for it or didn’t expect this problem, though most adjusted (see Learner comment 4);
Overall patterns

• Learners with a strong awareness of English grammar find that what they encounter doesn’t match their expectations;
• Some learners report they want to improve speaking so they sound like ‘an Australian’;
• Learners reporting pronunciation difficulties tend to be from L1s that are tonal (such as Mandarin), or which have different stress patterns than English (syllable timed);

Overall patterns

• Some learners report using communication strategies to overcome language shortcomings eg inventing words that combine L1 and English, to address shortcoming in language;
• The more learners are exposed to English, the more they are aware of their weaknesses example of pronunciation classes helping (see Learner comment 5).
Groups

- No discernable patterns of perceptions of progress based on gender, or CSWE level;
- Some variations for some L1 groups.

L1 speakers of a Chinese language

- See using written language as the basis of progress, because this is how they have learned before;
- But they also want to improve their speaking skills;
- Report being reliant on dictionaries (including electronic), to help them learn words - with reference to L1 translation;
- Talk about progress in learning as related to memorisation based on written form (whether word or structure);
L1 speakers of a Chinese language

• Find that what they encounter doesn’t match their expectations;
• Blame themselves for their shortcomings/lack of progress - the solution is to work harder (do more of the same - rather than change approach to learning);
• Say reading & writing has improved but speaking & listening hasn’t

See Learner comment 6

Speakers of African languages

• Say their speaking is ok (but still have difficulty with Australian accents);
• Are making slow progress with their reading and writing.
And some others…

• One eastern European learner who writes as she perceives sounds;
• Another Eastern European learner who improves when she worries less about grammatical mistakes. Progress in the workplace leads to improvements at home - and improvements in her family relationships (see Learner comment 7).

Implications

• Participation in AMEP classes helps learners have a sense of progress in their learning of English;
• Learners have some difficulties in coming to grips with Australian English, and especially spoken English;
• Prior experience of English language learning can influence what learners want to get out of the AMEP;
Implications

• How can providers help learners to identify weaknesses and address them?
• Mandarin speakers (and others with similar prior experience and approaches to learning) face particular issues in making progress with spoken English, related to their reliance on written language support (and culturally framed attitudes about speaking in class?)
• When is knowing ‘the rules’ a support to progress, and when is it a hindrance?