

Affective Filter

A safe learning environment is important to all language learning contexts (Krashen, 1982). This is even more important for Native languages undergoing language shift. Baker



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(2011) would call this language shift an act of subtractive cultural assimilation, which refers to modifying and subtracting the previously held languages, identities, and creates social and emotional barriers (p. 4).

Krashen (1982) argued that the affective filter must be kept low to allow the learner to be open for the input of the language (p. 66). The affective filter is high, when learners are anxious, bored, or suffer from negative

attitudes, or feeling of anxiety. This affective filter prevents learners from moving forward with their language learning or blocks the input (new language learned, hearing) and then, prevents learners from producing output (speaking) language.

I have seen this affective filter happen with adult language learners, who have negative attitudes or may feel anxious and unsure about speaking due to past learning experiences. One student from my class would not participate until the end of the semester. She stated that when she attended school as a child, she was not allowed to speak her Native language, and she was punished if she did. This trauma filtered her ability to speak in class, until she heard other students share the same experience. Only then was she able to fully participate in class, remembering and sharing words. This act of sharing began her language healing process. Beading provides a safe place to overcome the affective filter, because the focus is on the beading. Participating in a beading circle is a safe environment and allows learners to self identify with cultural language.

During this process a person needs to be calm and settled when beading. If the beading is done in a rush or with a feeling of impatience, then it will show through the beadwork. There will be signs of frustration, such as the thread being tangled or getting poked by the needle. When this has happened to me, I could hear my Aunt Katie say, when noticing my frustration, “It is time to put it away, and think of something else.” It was her way of saying you need to reframe your mind. This is similar to the affective filter, if the mind is in the wrong mindset, this creates barriers such as the knots or getting poked by the needle that prevents the beader from finishing or continuing. These are solid reasons for taking learning different ways to teach Ahtna Athabaskan through cultural activity. It adds a layer of meaning, reframing the mind to open and learn because confidence level has risen to experiment and learn new language. Creating a safe environment is just as important and adds to the success of language learning.