影响大学生英语学习因素之研究

Understanding the Learning Variables in Chinese EFL Contexts

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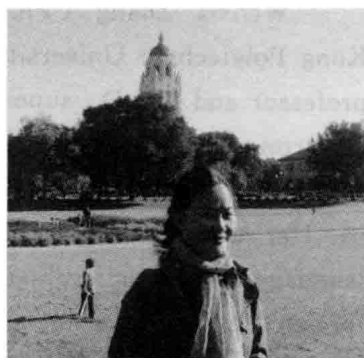Selected Poems by the Twelve Poets of Guizhou Province

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诗选

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About the Authors

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Contents

Chapter One

The Learning Variables in Language Learning: A Brief Review

It is generally acknowledged that a wide range of performance exists in language courses; while some students excel in learning a second or foreign language (SL/FL), many underachieve or fail to achieve what they desire. In order to understand this phenomenon, researchers have explored numerous factors that may affect language learning with focus on cognitive (e. g. , language aptitude, cognitive ability, strategy use), affective (e. g. , anxiety, self-confidence), personality (extroversion, locus of control), and/or demographic (e. g. , age, gender) variables (Booth-Butterfield, 1988; Covington & Omelich, 1987a; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990, 1995; Ewald, 2007; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; Glass et al. , 1995; Liu, 2007, 2009; Penkrun, 1984, 1992; Xiao & Zou, 2000; Young, 1999). However, only a few studies have investigated the role of these different factors simultaneously (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Gardner et al. , 1997; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 2000). As Gardner et al. (1997) state, there is a lack of research that examines the relationships among all these variables concurrently. A study with Chinese university EFL students may be of significance to contribute to the related literature and better understand the relationships.

Deploying statistical procedures to analyze data, the present study aims to investigate students' anxiety levels, language class risk-taking and sociability, English learning motivation, cognitive and metacognitive strategy use, and self-esteem with relation to their interaction and contribution to foreign language learning at the beginning and toward the end of the term. For this purpose, the present research recruited first-year undergraduates from three EFL contexts in China: Tsinghua University (TU) in Beijing, Hefei University of Technology (HUT) in Hefei, Anhui province, and

Beijing Union University (BUU).

1.1 Anxiety and foreign/second language learning

As one of the major psychological variables in education, anxiety has been shown by numerous studies to play an important or even deciding role in determining academic achievement levels (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Its role in SL/FL teaching and learning has also been recognized and researched on extensively in recent decades (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Horwitz, 1995; Liu, 2006, 2007).

As a complex, multidimensional phenomenon (Scovel, 1978; Young, 1991b), foreign language anxiety is "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b: 284). Williams defines it as "a response to a condition in which the external element is or is perceived as presenting a demand that threatens to exceed the student's capabilities and resources for meeting it" (1991: 25). As a specific type of foreign language anxiety, foreign language classroom anxiety is "a distinct complex of self perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986: 128). Students in language classes may engage in negative self-talk, ruminating over a poor performance, which affects their ability to process information in FL contexts (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a).

Among the researchers to investigate foreign language anxiety, a prominent figure is Horwitz who proposed a general theory about foreign language classroom anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). She and her colleagues (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128) described foreign language classroom anxiety as "a distinct complex of self perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." They (1986) proposed that there were three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension was "a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about

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communicating with people" (1986, p. 127). Test anxiety referred to "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" (1986, p. 127). Fear of negative evaluation, which might occur in any social and evaluative situation, meant "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969, cited in Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Because complex and non-spontaneous mental operations were required in order to communicate, "any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

In order to identify anxious university students and measure their anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which has gained widespread popularity in subsequent studies on anxiety in SL/FL learning situations (Chen, 2002; Cheng et al., 1999; Dewaele, 2013; Ewald, 2007; Liu, 2006; Phillips, 1992; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Shao, Ji & Yu, 2013; Wang & Ding, 2001; Zhang, 2001). These studies have revealed that anxiety is experienced by many students in SL/FL learning and adversely affects their learning of the language, that students with debilitating anxiety in the SL/FL classroom setting can be identified, and that students with high anxiety levels tend to be afraid to speak in the target language and become nervous when speaking it. In addition, Zhang (2001) found that low-anxious students' speech was faster and had fewer unnatural pauses than did high-anxious students. Wang's (2003) study revealed that female university students were less anxious than their male counterparts and that Chinese non-English majors scored much lower than those language learners in other countries.

Also, many researchers who were dissatisfied with measure scales adopted more qualitative methods such as interviews, dairies and observations to explore the nature, characteristics, sources, and consequences of foreign language anxiety (Bailey, 1983; Liu, 2007; Liu & Jackson, 2011; Price, 1991; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Young, 1991). They identified such factors as personality, learning styles, the classroom experience, proficiency in the target language and past experiences as sources for students' anxiety in SL/FL classrooms.

Moreover, mainly by interviewing 20 students at the beginning and the end of a term respectively and asking 93 survey participants to write reflective journals for six consecutive weeks, Liu (2009) found that most participants became less and less anxious as the term progressed because of various reasons such as more exposure to the target language, greater familiarity with the classroom environment, and becoming more confident.

In short, clinical experience, empirical findings, and personal reports all attest to the existence of anxiety reactions with respect to language learning in many individuals (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; Liu, 2006, 2007; Mak, 2011; Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009; Pichette, 2009; Proulx, 1991; Tallon, 2009; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Young, 1991; Zhang, 2001). Studies have also suggested that foreign language anxiety relates to memory (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Sellers, 2000), reticence and unwillingness to communicate (Liu & Jackson, 2008), social desirability (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Gürsoy & Akin, 2013), learning style and learning strategies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1999), confidence and self-esteem (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Mak & White, 1997), attitudes towards errors and mistakes (Mak & White, 1997), teaching styles (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Mak & White, 1997), attitude and motivation (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995), personality (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Liu & Zhang, 2008), and so on.

1. 2 Language class risk-taking and sociability

The classroom is a crucial place for students' interpersonal and educational development (Pierce, 1994). For years, researchers and educators have been interested in the relationship between students' classroom participation and their academic achievement, which shows that students who participate actively in class tend to achieve higher than those who are passive in class (Ely, 1986; Liu & Jackson, 2008; McDonough, 2004; Spada, 1986). As Krupa-Kwiatkowski (1998: 133) claimed that "interaction involves participation, personal engagement, and the taking of initiative in some way, activities that in turn are hypothesized to trigger cognitive processes conducive to language learning". Since oral participation is the most observable behavior,

much research has focused on this and its relationship with students' English proficiency or performance (Ely, 1986; Tsou, 2005).

In various language learning contexts, learners have been observed to be quiet in language classrooms, rarely responding to teachers' questions, or actively taking part in classroom discussions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Jackson, 2002; Tsui, 1996; Zou, 2004). Asian learners are especially often viewed as being passive, lacking initiative, and rarely volunteering answers (Liu, 2006, 2009; Liu & Jackson, 2009; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément & Donovan, 2003; Saito & Ebsworth, 2004; Tsui, 1996; Zou, 2004). As to gender difference in faculty-student interactions, mixed findings were revealed. For instance, Krupnick (1985) found that male students interacted more with their instructors than female students. Canada and Pringle (1995) found that female students initiated more faculty-student interactions than male students within mixed-sex classrooms, which was supported by the subsequent research done by Lin and Rancer (2003). Nevertheless, Brady and Eisler's (1999) study of 24 classes from various disciplines at a major university in America showed that men and women did not differ significantly in terms of their behaviors and interactions with faculty members, and that male-dominated classrooms were rated significantly less interactive than female-dominated and nondominated classrooms. The researchers also found that instructor monitoring of equity was the strongest predictor of an interactive classroom.

As English is becoming increasingly more important in China, and as the confidence of many Chinese people has been tremendously boosted up in recent years, it is assumed that Chinese EFL learners, especially university learners should be more enthusiastic, open-minded and active to learn and use English both in and outside class. Presumably, they should tend to be more risk-taking and sociable in English class. To confirm this assumption, the present study also aims to explore the changes in risk-taking and sociability in English class in relation to their relationships with the students' performance in English.

1.3 Language learning motivation

Inspired and spearheaded by social psychologist Robert Gardner

in Canada (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995), motivation research has gained wide popularity in both second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) contexts. According to Gardner and his colleagues, motivation involves three components—"attitudes toward learning the second language, desire to learn the language, and effort expended in learning the language" (Gardner, Lalonde & Pierson, 1983: 2). Two important components of motivation are also claimed—integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation reflects the learner's willingness or a desire to be like representative members of the target language community and is often held to be a superior support for language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Instrumental motivation refers to more functional reasons for learning a language such as getting a better job or a promotion and pertains to the potential pragmatic gains of L2 proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

To measure SL learning motivation, Gardner (1985) developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), a multi-component motivation test made up of around 130 items concerned with such variables as attitudes towards, interest in and orientation to learn the target language. The development of the Battery has resulted in numerous research studies on SL/FL learning motivation, which expose that motivation enhances SL/FL acquisition, and that learners ranking high on integrative orientation work harder and learn faster than those who are low on integrative motivation (Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994; Gardner, 1985; 2002; Gardner et al. , 1983; Gardner, Lalonde & Moorcroft, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Lai, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995).

Later research (Belmechri & Hummel, 1998; Dörnyei & Clément, 2002; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Kouritzin, Piquemal & Renaud, 2009; Ramage, 1990; Ushioda, 1996, 2006, 2007, 2008; Wesely, 2009) shows that these two orientations are not opposite ends of a continuum, but are positively related, affectively loaded goals that can sustain motivation. The results demonstrate that one cannot simply assume cross-cultural pervasiveness of the integrative and instrumental orientations. L2 learning goals can break up into different orientation clusters, the definition of which varies depending upon the sociocultural setting in which the data

were gathered. For example, success in language itself can lead to improved motivation. Thus, new motivation clusters have been identified such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, orientations for travel and becoming intellectual, which are considered specific types of orientations for learning the target language (Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994; Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Extrinsic motivation, like instrumental motivation, refers to the desire to learn a SL/FL because of some pressure or reward from the social environment (such as career advancement or a course credit), internalized reasons for learning the target language (such as guilt or shame), and/or personal decisions to do so and its value for the chosen goals (Noels et al., 2001). Intrinsically motivated students, like integratively motivated ones, learn the target language because of their inherent pleasure in doing so and are expected to maintain their effort and engagement in the learning process even when no external rewards are provided (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Noels et al., 2001). When a learner has no extrinsic or intrinsic goals for learning a language, amotivation arises. Consequently, the learner may quit learning the target language at the earliest convenience (Noels et al., 2001). As these concepts have gained popularity, it is claimed that intrinsic motivation plays a central role in learning a SL/FL (Noels et al., 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

Ramage's (1990) research concerns the ability of motivational and attitudinal factors to distinguish continuing students from discontinuing students of high school FL study. The results showed that the practical value of FL study failed to provide students with the motivation to continue, that intrinsic motives emerged as stronger contributors than did extrinsic motives, and that continuing students were aiming toward a goal of proficiency in the language whereas discontinuing students were primarily concerned with fulfilling a requirement. As a result, the researcher suggested that the promotion of motivations and attitudes that could lead to continuation in FL study could be addressed within the formal educational setting as well as in a broader context.

Belmechri and Hummel (1998) investigated the emergence of orientations and their relation to motivation in a predominantly monolingual context in Quebec City. Based on the questionnaires distributed to 93 high school students, they found that the students'

orientations were: travel, understanding school (instrumental), friendship, understanding, and career (instrumental). The analyses of the data revealed that understanding and career orientation emerged as important to ESL learning in the context, that they didn't show an integrative orientation for learning ESL, and that various orientations were related to motivation and functioned as predictors of motivation.

Moreover, the motivation construct has also been expanded to include interest, expectancy and outcomes, and so on (Dörnyei, 2001; Keller, 1983; Noels et al., 2001). As Keller claimed, interest is a prerequisite for "sustained motivation and requires the learner to perceive that important personal needs are being met by the learning situation" (1983: 406). Expectancy draws upon research based on the concepts of locus of control, expectation for success, and attributions concerning success or failure. In general, learners who think they are likely to succeed are more highly motivated than are those who expect to fail; those who think they control their own learning and attribute success or failure to their own efforts are more motivated than are those who attribute outcomes to external causes such as luck, a teacher's moods, or the difficulty of a task (Deci, 1975; Pintrich, 1989). Outcomes are also important motivating forces in language learning.

Meanwhile, motivation research has also been flourishing in China in recent years (Gao, Zhao, Cheng & Zhou, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Hao, Liu & Hao, 2004; Li, Gao & Qian; 2003; Wen, 1996, 2001; Zheng, 1987). Administering a 114-item self-developed questionnaire to 71 undergraduate and 45 non-undergraduate French majors, Zheng (1987) identified three types of learning motivation: indirect motivation oriented to learning results, direct motivation oriented to learning itself, and motivation formed through other stimuli. As one of the leading researchers, Wen (1996) proposed the concept of surface motivation and deep motivation, with the former being defined as material stimulus such as diplomas, better jobs, and higher pays and the latter referring to non-material stimulus such as interest in and knowledge of the language. Within this theoretical framework, Wen (2001) conducted a longitudinal study of motivation, beliefs and strategies of 72 undergraduate English majors. Analyses of the quantitative data gathered via a 63-item self-