

A Brief Analysis of Motivation, Anxiety, and Willingness to Communication in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

This essay mainly analyzes the motivation, anxiety, and willingness to communication (WTC) in second language acquisition. First, relative studies in these three fields are elaborated, and secondly, this essay discusses the connections between them in light of authors' own experiences.

Keywords

Motivation; Anxiety; WTC; SLA.

1. Introduction

Motivation, anxiety and willingness to communication have long been a question of great interest in a wide range of second language acquisition fields. The learning outcomes of second language learners have a deep connection with the above three factors. Firstly, based on Ortega's (2014) research, this essay explains the definition of motivation, development trend as well as relevant significant theories. And present my views connecting my personal studying and teaching experience. Secondly, in the part of anxiety, it states the symptoms of anxiety and related research. Discuss and analyze the handling of anxiety in teaching. In addition, two different types of anxiety and their impact on learners are analyzed. How to turn debilitating anxiety into facilitating anxiety is also the emphasis of this essay. Then, WTC and the teaching method that evokes WTC are discussed based on my own experience. Finally, according to a series of relevant studies, this essay discusses the link between motivation and anxiety, anxiety and WTC, motivation and WTC, which play a significant role in L2 learning.

2. Motivation

Motivation is a very important and complex factor in second language learning, which has attracted the attention of many researchers. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) points out that "L2 motivation is one of the most important factors that determine the rate and success of L2 attainment" and he argues that without enough motivation, the learner with the best abilities can't accomplish long-term goals (p.203). The view of Papi (2010) shows that motivation is one of the most elusive concepts in second language research. Ortega (2014) introduces three dimensions of motivation: how much effort people expend in L2 learning, i.e., motivational intensity; how much enjoyment people feeling when learn L2, i.e., attitudes; and how much personal investment in L2 learning, i.e., desiring to learn. Several years later, there is relevant literature written by Piniel and Csizér (2013), and they summarized the opinion of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), "the definition of motivation should cover student's choice, effort and persistence" (p. 525). there are three significant theoretical outcomes in the field of motivation research: integrative motivation; self-determination theory; and the L2 motivational self-system.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) thought that integrative motivation reflect a personal interest in other community including people and culture (summarized by Papi, 2010, p. 468), which means if a person is interested in other cultures and he is willing to make friends with people

from other countries, he has motivation to learn a foreign language. Gardner (2001) believes that integrative motivation is the highest and most facilitative form (summarized by Ortega, 2014, p. 171). After the motivation model Gardner proposed, during mid-1990s, a new trend began to emerge.

Researchers start to pay attention to motivational quality rather than quantity, such as self-determination theory. Vansteenkiste et al. (2006) thinks "self-determination theory construes humans as volitional beings who are growth-oriented" (summarized by Ortega, 2014, p.175). And in this literature of Ortega, she argues that when individuals engage in self-selecting behaviors and largely maintain the enjoyment process, then they are considered to be internally motivated. While when individuals regard their actions as being constructed by external environment or pragmatic causation, their sense of self-causality and autonomy is low, which is called external motivation (p.176). For example, when a person wants to learn one more foreign language to improve himself, he is internally motivated while if this person chooses to learn a foreign language for some professional reason, he is externally motivated.

The L2 motivational self-system as a latest theory proposed by Dornyei, includes ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience. "Ideal L2 self represents an ideal image of the kind of L2 user one aspires to be in the future". For example, people speak L2 fluently in order to make international friends. Ought-to L2 self-represent "the L2-specific aspect of one's ought to self". L2 learners judge they have responsibility or duty to learn foreign language, such as for achieving their career aspirations, which is more like extrinsic motivation. It should be mentioned that the ought-to L2 self-bring effect on learner's motivated behavior is less than that of the ideal L2 self. In terms of the L2 learning experience, learners' attitude towards second language learning is influenced by learning environment and previous learning experience. Dornyei (2009) mentioned that learners' initial motivations do not come from internal and external motivations, but from successful participation in the real language learning process. And learners' motivations are influenced by the subject-specific motives, such as curriculum settings, teachers, peers, and teaching materials (summarized by Papi, 2010, p.468-469). For example, in China, many students like English. Part of the reason is their career aspirations or international vision, and more reasons are that they like the atmosphere or teachers in English classes. As far as my experience of learning English is concerned, I like my English teacher, so I put more effort into English. After I become a teacher, I find that my students look forward to English lessons because they like me. And with the improvement of teaching tools such as computers and the use of slides in the classroom, the students' learning environment became more friendly, which promotes their foreign language learning.

Motivation is a factor that teachers may consider during the process of teaching foreign language. In one lesson, motivation is the beginning of a student's successful second language acquisition. Drawing on research from Piniel and Csizér (2013), they argue that, firstly, the motivated learning behavior of students will enhance their learning experiences, which means the more motivated a student is, the more positively she or he will regard the learning experience. And this condition is in a positive relationship with facilitating anxiety (p. 536). In my experience, I have also found that a lesson with interesting warming-up is easier to bring motivation to students. With enough motivation, students can master the target language better, rather than resist it because they feel it is boring or there is no motivation.

In the process of second language learning, it is beneficial to stimulate students' internal motivations, i.e., to make them interested in the L2 they learn and make them realize the value for that. In this case, students are more likely to attain target language on their own initiative, which brings advantage to second language acquisition. According to the data from experiment, Papi (2010) reviews "Among the components of the L2 motivational self-system, the ought-to English self has the least effect on intended effort, and also has no impact on English learning experience." And he points out that the ought-to L2 self-increases the anxiety level of students

whereas the ideal L2 self can decrease it (p. 474). Sometimes, if learners pay too much attention to external factors, for example, they think they need to achieve a certain goal, so they have to learn a foreign language. In this process, learners themselves have little initiative. On the contrary, paying too much attention to external factors will cause pressure to learners, make them anxious, and affect the effect of language learning. For example, among my students, students who sincerely like English have a better learning effect than those who learn English only because of their scores. Because those students who like English will actively create opportunities to come into contact with this language, such as watching English novels, English movies, paying attention to news in English-speaking countries, etc. These behaviors are the latter students will not take the initiative to do.

Papi (2010) pointed out an opinion, which is, negative second language experiences lead to the increase of L2 anxiety, whereas positive learning experiences make the students less anxiety (p.475). An implication of this is the possibility that it is reasonable to pay attention to students' learning status in the course of teaching. Factors which influence students' condition include the design of appropriate teaching content, the teaching environment, peers with the same level, as well as teaching materials. This also links with the earlier observations, which shows that positive learning attitudes, a positive L2 environment, culture as well as satisfaction with teachers and teaching process, can all contribute significantly to motivation (Ortega, 2014, p.190).

Drawing on the research from the field of motivation and gender, many researchers find that male learners are less motivated than female counterpart (summarized by Iwaniec, 2019, p.131). I agree with this observation because this finding was also confirmed by Iwaniec (2019) and she indicates that male learners are unlikely to actively treat their own learning by creating a favorable learning environment, adopting effective learning strategies and reflecting on their own learning (p. 138). Moreover, the research shows that "girls appeared to be more interested in communication with speakers of English around the world than boys", which result in the different international orientation among gender (p. 137). In the class, gender differences can lead to different levels of motivation, i.e., female students have higher motivation than male students. As far as I am concerned, it is necessary for teachers to consider how to use different methods to motivate girls and boys. For example, boys and girls can be arranged as partners in the classroom, so that girls will play a role in promoting to some extent.

In teaching, it is a good choice to refer to ten commandments for motivating Language learners provided by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998). However, specific strategies need to be selected according to the background of the learners in the classroom. Studies from Hsing-Fu and Dörnyei (2015) have shown that some motivation strategies are applicable to both Taiwanese and Hungarian students, while some of them are no longer applicable to both of them due to changes in cultural background. For example, the most significant difference is that motivation only promotes the learning autonomy of Hungarian students, but it does not appear in Taiwan students (p.171).

3. Anxiety

Except motivation, anxiety has a pivotal role in second language acquisition. Such a affect factor gets a lot of researchers' attention. Ortega (2014) demonstrates that "some individuals report experiencing intense feelings of apprehension, tension, and even fear, when they think of foreign language". This physiological phenomenon is called anxiety (p.100). What is more, in her interesting analysis of anxiety, students with high anxiety receive lower grades in their foreign language courses than that of low-anxiety students. Therefore, high, debilitating levels of anxiety do cause a negative impact to academic achievement in foreign language class (p. 201). Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999) found that "anxiety levels were associated to low sense of self-

worth and low perceptions of their own general academic ability” (summarized by Ortega, 2014, p. 201). In the same vein, many studies note that anxiety derives from self-perception and self-concept (2008, p. 201). If anxiety occurs, learners have a hunch that they will fail and have a poor performance. Learners who are in foreign language anxiety have many symptoms, such as lower grades, lower proficiency performances, difficulty with processing and learning new L2 material, reticence and L2 risk-avoiding behaviors.

Commenting on anxiety, Teimouri et al. (2019) argues: anxiety has a moderate negative association with achievement” (p. 381). Therefore, it is very important to focus on anxiety and avoid it in the process of second language learning. Obviously, anxiety is reflected in all aspects of language skills acquisition. However, it is typically most acute for speaking (Dewaele & IP, 2013, p. 48). This means that creating a relaxed and comfortable communication environment in the speaking class to reduce students’ anxiety is something that teachers may consider. When I was young, in English class, my teacher would add a lot of communication activities and fun games to the class, so that we learn foreign languages in such an environment that I rarely feel anxious in class. Foreign language anxiety does not appear immediately. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) points out that students will become anxious and uncomfortable because they encounter difficulties and make mistakes in the early stages of second language acquisition. If such a stage is repeated all the time, then foreign language anxiety will appear (summarized by Dewaele and IP, 2013, p. 49). I agree with this viewpoint. In the early stages of exposure to foreign languages, students will inevitably make grammatical errors due to the differences between the foreign language and their mother tongue. This is a phenomenon that occurs during the process of interlanguage. The student feels anxious subconsciously because of making a mistake. Therefore, the teacher may play an important role to encourage them, relieving the repetition of anxiety. Of course, except to external factors, learner’s own conditions are related to the anxiety. The result from the research of Dewaele (2010) shows that the younger the learners, the less foreign language anxiety they have. People who learn second language only in class are more anxious than those who learn outside of class. It is known that the learner’s understanding of the relevant language is inversely proportional to the degree of anxiety. The more frequently a foreign language is used, the lower the foreign language anxiety. Therefore, knowing more languages more specifically and knowing more language types related to foreign languages improves learners’ self-perceived communicative competence and reduces their foreign language anxiety (summarized by Dewaele and IP, 2013, pp. 49-50). For example, according to my learning experience, when I first came into contact with English, I found it difficult to speak in English. And when I have studied English for many years, I found that my English ability has been improved and my anxiety has decreased significantly.

The above factors that trigger high or low levels of anxiety may need to be considered from the perspective of long-term evaluation of learners. There is another significant element from Dewaele and IP’s research (2013): tolerance of ambiguity (TA), related to anxiety, and they review: “people feel anxious when there is ambiguity, and the level of anxiety is related to the individual’s level of TA” (p. 58). The data illustrates that second language tolerance of ambiguity (SLTA) influences second language learning performance directly. SLTA will be low when the learners get anxious (Dewaele and IP, 2013, p. 59). Moreover, the most important clinically relevant finding is the lower the TA, the higher the anxiety in foreign language classrooms. The higher the TA, the higher the level of English. The higher the class anxiety, the lower the level of English (Dewaele and IP, 2013, p. 56). This imply that teachers may appropriately divert students’ attention and increase their tolerance for errors, that is, emphasize flexibility and encourage students to embrace ambiguity when they make mistakes. Based on my teaching experience, for example, in speaking lesson, a student kept making mistakes and i was eager to correct him immediately, then slowly he would be reluctant to speak actively because he

wanted to avoid making mistakes. On the contrary, in the next class, instead of directly pointing to the students' mistakes, I encouraged them, so they gradually became active. In addition, if the student himself pays too much attention to errors in oral expression, his fluency will be affected, and he will be aware of it. Consequently, anxiety will happen.

Not all anxiety will hinder second language learning. Researchers divide anxiety into two types, one is debilitating anxiety and the other is facilitating anxiety. These two kinds of anxiety have completely different effects on students. Alpert and Haber (1960) represent: "facilitating anxiety enhances performance, whereas debilitating anxiety inhibits it" (summarized by Piniel and Csizér, 2013, p. 527). The experimental results from Piniel and Csizér (2013) show that compared with debilitating anxiety, facilitating anxiety affects motivated language learning to a greater extent. And this research has found that learners with higher levels of facilitating anxiety will try more difficult language structures (p. 538). Consequently, it is reasonable for teachers to consider how to arouse facilitating anxiety of students. According to flow theory which proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), the tasks assigned by the teacher should be appropriately difficult, i.e., not too difficult or too simple. Such a teaching task can arouse facilitating anxiety to the greatest extent (summarized by Piniel and Csizér, 2013, p. 538). Language tasks that are too simple will make learners feel bored, while language tasks that are too difficult will burden them. Therefore, as a teacher, setting up curriculum content suitable for the level of learners may not only make learners feel the improvement of their ability, but also prevent them from anxiety.

4. Willingness to Communication

Willingness to communication was developed in the field of communication in the 1980s because researchers emphasize communication in language research, and it is emerging as a concept to account for individuals' first language and second language. In the first language, WTC is related to introversion, shyness, apprehension of communication and reticence, which are called personality sub-traits (Ortega, 2014, p.202). Whereas, in the second language, researchers regarded it as the effective variable in the use of L2 (Ghani & Azhar, 2017, p. 168). L2 communicative confidence associated with WTC in the L2. Ortega (2014) views: "an individual's communicative confidence in the L2 greatly contributes to her or his WTC in the L2" (p. 202). She states how relaxed or nervous a person is and how competent or incompetent a person feels measure his L2 communicative confidence (p. 203). WTC originates from the learner's second language ability and second language communicative confidence. Ortega (2014) argues that the low chance of exposure to second language leads to low second language ability and second language self-confidence, causing low WTC level (p. 204). In my opinion, foreign language students, such as Chinese students, have limited exposure to English every week. It's not enough to just rely on weekly speaking lessons, for this reason, in addition to the regular class time, it is feasible to add additional foreign language activities, such as encouraging students to watch English movies, making them participate in English oral corners, or create more opportunities to use English etc. In this way, students may increase their L2 competence and confidence so that they are more willing to communicate in the L2. In the study of Ortega (2014), there is no proof to establish link between WTC in the L2 and frequency of communicative behavior. However, interestingly, such a relationship is confirmed by Ghani and Azhar (2017) and they find "WTC is identified as the second most effective variable that affects frequency of use of ESL for oral communication" (p. 168). Therefore, WTC promotes second language acquisition to some extent. Moreover, teachers' feedback to students in the classroom will affect students' WTC. Drawing on an interesting study, Zare et al. (2020) find that no matter what level of learners receive the teacher's immediate oral corrective feedback, they will show a higher WCT level (p. 15), which gives the teacher a lot of teaching inspiration. In my learning

experience, in the speaking class, my English teacher's prompt encouragement and gentle correction to us will make us more interested and motivated in English communication.

5. Discussion

SLA work on motivation, foreign language anxiety and WTC draws heavily on theories and methods from social psychology. Many researchers have done many experiments involving these three factors, and found the connection among them, which provides implication for pedagogical methods.

5.1. The Connection Between Anxiety and Motivation

In the process of learners learning second language, motivation and anxiety affect each other, i.e., some motivations can alleviate anxiety, and some anxiety can interfere motivation. The result from Papi (2010) shows that as one of the main components of L2 motivational Self System, negative second language experiences lead to the increase of L2 anxiety, whereas positive learning experiences make the students less anxious (p. 475). Another interesting finding is that Ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience decreased students' English anxiety, while the ought-to L2 self significantly made them more anxious (p. 467). Similarly, she believes that anxiety affects motivation as well: "Anxiety impacts L2 learning motivation and willingness to communicate which has a positive correlation with L2 motivation" (p. 470). Piniel and Csizér (2013) pay more attention to facilitating and debilitating anxiety in research. Drawing on the study from them, "both facilitating and debilitating anxiety have an impact on motivated learning behavior." But compared to debilitating anxiety, facilitating anxiety has a greater impact on motivated language learning (p. 536-538). In my opinion, it is feasible to set practical teaching themes in the classroom to increase students' intrinsic motivation or the ideal L2 self, that is, make them think that learning a new language can improve their abilities. And set up courses with appropriate difficulty level according to the level of students, so as to promote students' facilitating anxiety.

5.2. The Connection Between Anxiety and WTC

Learner anxiety have a negative impact on WTC in the L2. Fatima et al. (2020), through research, point out "perceived communicative confidence and L2 speaking anxiety were the most significant predictors for L2 WTC" (p. 920). Ortega (2014) represents: "the antecedents of L2 WTC are L2 communicative confidence (which itself is predicted by anxiety and self-perceived competence)" (p. 213). In other words, Anxiety of the learner impedes L2 communicative confidence and thus cause damage in L2 WTC. From my experience, anxious children in the class tend to be more unsure of themselves. They are unwilling to speak a foreign language, which is not conducive to second language acquisition. Therefore, constant encouragement is very important. Both teachers and students should tolerate mistakes.

5.3. The Connection Between Motivation and WTC

Compared with anxiety, motivation bring positive effect to WTC in L2. Yashima (2002) finds: "motivation affected self-confidence in L2 communication which led to willingness to communicate in a L2" (p. 54). She also reasons out that individuals with higher motivation will contribute to proficiency and confidence in L2 communication. Such a factor has a strong and direct influence on L2 WTC (2002, p. 62). As far as my teaching experience is concerned, students who are appreciated by the surrounding environment will have a stronger sense of self-worth, and at the same time they will be more confident in communication and more willing to communicate.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in young students. For example, in the interactive session, the teacher's encouragement, including eye contact encouragement, gesture

encouragement, can make students more confident in their output. Even if there are some errors in the communication, young students can confidently complete the conversation. And in this case, they are still willing to communicate in L2.

6. Conclusion

In general, The result of researches of motivation, anxiety and WTC support the idea that these three factors have a considerable impact in the process of second language acquisition. In terms of motivation, researchers have defined different types of motivation with the development of study, such as traditional model, self-determination model and L2 motivational system. Traditional model such as integrative motivation pay attention to the relationship between learners and foreign cultures. Learners are interested in foreign cultures, which leads to learn relative languages to further understand it.

The research of self-determination model explores more on the quality of motivation. Researchers distinguish intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. These research results have brought a lot of enlightenment to pedagogical methods. Intrinsic motivation means that the learner is motivated by the learner's own subjective wishes when learning a language. And extrinsic motivation means motivation from the outside world, accompanied by goals and results. And when learners suffer from amotivation, then their learning state is very passive. The latest research objective is L2 motivational system, including ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience. These three concepts describe the learners' subjective wishes, external factors, and motivations brought about by their own learning experience. In terms of anxiety, it is found from the former research that anxiety mainly brings negative effects to learners. Anxious students will have related symptoms in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but they are the most intense in speaking. Not all types of anxiety have a negative impact on language learning. Facilitating anxiety will promote students' mastery of complex language structures to a certain extent.

In the research field of second language acquisition, as the research focus shifts from second language teaching and learning to communication, many researchers focus on the connection between motivation, anxiety, and WTC. First, the relationship between motivation and anxiety is confirmed: high motivation can alleviate anxiety. Anxiety affects confidence in second language communication and WTC, thereby affecting motivation. Moreover, motivation and anxiety have respectively positive and negative effects on WTC. All in all, the three discussion objects in this essay are all associated with each other, and they bring significant implications on the learning effect of second language learners and teaching methods.

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