

A Study of the Internal Factors Influencing Chinese Learning of Foreign Students in China

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Abstract: the process of second language acquisition is extremely complex, in the same way, the factors that affect the foreign students' Chinese learning in china are various and complex. Therefore, based on an empirical survey of the internal factors that are important to the Chinese learning of the international students who study Chinese in china, this paper aims to understand the structure of motivation, their motivational self system and other internal factors, including Chinese learning anxiety, self-efficacy and self-regulation

Keywords: Internal factors, Foreign students, Chinese learning

1. Introduction

The process of second language acquisition is extremely complex, involving a lot of internal and external factors that influence the language acquisition process and results. For this reason, the study of various learner characteristics like motivation, language anxiety, self-regulation and self-efficacy is not only an important research topic in psychology and education, but also a prominent area and active research field of applied linguistic investigations for the past years.

Many factors affect second language acquisition (SLA), (or foreign language learning) because it is well accepted that the process of second language acquisition is very complex, involving a lot of internal and external factors that influence the results of second language acquisition . So the second language acquisition research has always been a broad and active research field and attracted many researchers.

Though people do not exhibit substantial individual variation in native language acquisition, the learning of a second language or foreign language is just the opposite. In both the quality and quantity of the attained L2 knowledge and skills and many non-linguistic variables, we can see dramatic person –to –person disparity. For this reason, the study of various learner characteristics – such as language aptitude and motivation – has been a prominent area and applied linguistic for the past few decades. Thus internal factors like motivation have always drawn the attention of the language researches. One of the reasons for the difference of acquisition of L1 and L2 or even L3 is that in most situations people begin to learn a second language or foreign language consciously; that is to say, they have developed their cognition and affect to such an extent that their cognitive language learning and emotion are interwoven.

It can be seen above that the internal factors like motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy, self –regulation are not only an important research topic in psychology and education, but also a hot topic in the research in the research area of second language acquisition . Therefore, it is of important theoretical significance to study the internal factors of the foreign students that influence their L2 acquisition, that is, Chinese learning in china.

2. Language Learning Motivation

In recent years, the internal factors influencing students' learning, such as language learning motivation, language learning anxiety, self-regulation, not only draw attention from field of education and psychology, but also arouse the interest from second language acquisition researchers.

Among the cognitive, affective, social and environmental factors that have been regarded as a principal determinant of second language acquisition, comparable in its impact to language aptitude, which is another well-researched learner variable. And therefore, substantial research has been done on motivation. However, even though the role of motivation in second language acquisition has been the subject of extensive scholarship over the past decades, we are still far from understanding all the details of motivation, as motivation is internally a complex concept. Any single perspective is not sufficient for the studies related to it. So different perspectives to study motivation are obviously needed in both SLA and psychology of education if we want to build a comprehensive research framework of L2 motivation theory. And the history of L2 motivation studies has just witnessed the various research perspectives. L2 motivation research in the past 50 years has seen that motivation itself is a complex and composite construct and therefore it has been approached from different perspectives. Before 1990, L2 motivation was almost completely researched under a social psychological approach. In the 1990s, researchers furthered the understanding of L2 motivation by importing mainstream motivational theories in psychology that are essentially cognitively oriented. At the beginning of the 21st century, L2 motivation researchers began to take into account its dynamic and fluctuating temporal nature, stressing on the interconnected processes in terms of initiating, maintaining, and reflecting upon acts of learning in a task. In 2005, a new “self” perspective was introduced into the L2 motivation research by Dornyei.

Literature review also shows that a lot of attention has been paid to the investigation on the internal structure of motivation. In the early 1960s, Gardner & Lambert suggested that learners are motivated to learn a target language to differing degrees depending on their attitude toward the target culture. Their classic motivation research model includes three elements: motivational intensity, willingness to learn and attitude towards the target language.

The traditional motivation research framework, especially Gardner’s concept of integrative and instrumental motivations, has shaped much of the L2 motivation research worldwide. However, the dichotomy between integrative and instrumental motivations has been found unsatisfactory by some researchers later, who voiced a desire in the 1990s to broaden the boundaries of the field beyond those defined by the dichotomy paradigm. In terms of classification of motivation, Brown argues that the integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Language learning anxiety is a more complex issue. Language learning anxiety fluctuates greatly. After the foreign students stay in China studying Chinese for a few years, they would feel less anxious than before, but later they are going to be more anxious, because the more Chinese they learn, the deeper-seated issues of culture they meet, learning Chinese becomes more and more difficult.

3. Language Learning Anxiety

Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis holds that learners are influenced by various affective factors in the process of foreign language learning. Many scholars believe that anxiety is the most affective factor that can predict the learning outcomes of learners.

The study of language anxiety in foreign language teaching circles began in the 1970s, in which the representative are Gardner, Lambert, Scovel and so on. They use different research methods to make a great deal of research on the motivation of foreign learners and their relationship with language anxiety in different teaching environments.

Domestically, many scholars have introduced and drawn lessons from western research. Their research has played a very important role in deepening the theory of language anxiety.

In comparison group survey among 315 participants, we found that the foreign language anxiety level of language test pass group was significantly lower than the fail group; there was no significant difference between male and female students in terms of foreign language anxiety; foreign language anxiety is negatively correlated with foreign language achievement; language anxiety is a significant predictor variable for the foreign language performance.

So it can be concluded now that language learning anxiety, self-regulation, self-efficacy of the foreign students are strongly correlated with their motivational efforts. If a student has strong self-regulation ability or strong belief that he or she could learn Chinese well or lower Chinese

learning anxiety, then it is very possible that the student would be strongly motivated in Chinese study, and vice versa. Therefore, the hypothesis in this section cannot be rejected.

4. Self-Efficacy of Language Learning

In recent years, self-efficacy is not only the research interest in the fields of education and psychology, but also receives widespread attention in the field of second language acquisition. Many students have shown that self-efficacy has great influence on second language acquisition. Some foreign researcher investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and achievement of french based on the data of 303 American college students who were learning French and found that self-efficacy was a good predictor of their french test scores.

Many scholars in china have also carried out a lot of research on self -efficacy . in a research on the relationship between autonomous learning on internet and self-efficacy, Chen found that autonomous learning was positively correlated with self-efficacy .

Checking the total explained variance and the scree plot, one can see that a common construct was determined by two categories of factors above, with the total variance explained by 80.08%;the factor load on the two factors was respectively between 0.82 and 0.94 . in addition, the correlation coefficient between the total score of self-efficacy questionnaire and the two declension of the questionnaire was significant . the statistical results above showed that the item's content can reflect the self-efficacy characteristics in Chinese acquisition of the foreign students.

5. Conclusion

The internal factors like motivation, anxiety, self-efficacy, self -regulation are not only an important research topic in the area of social sciences, but also of significance in the research area of second language acquisition, including teaching Chinese as a second language in china . Therefore it is of important theoretical significance to study the internal factors of the foreign students that influence their Chinese learning .

Last but not least, further studies should be conducted in the framework of dynamic complex system with the assistance of big data technology, as the internal factors concerning the Chinese learning of foreign students in china are interwoven socially, politically and culturally with many variables.

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