

Foreign Language Anxiety in SLA

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Abstract: Foreign language anxiety is a variety of unpleasant emotional and psychological manifestations caused by many factors in foreign language learning. With the development of second language acquisition in recent years, the impact of emotional factors in education has received increasing attention. It is also becoming increasingly important to study the relationship between foreign language anxiety and second language acquisition and how to reduce the negative impact of language anxiety on second language acquisition. Therefore, this paper starts from the cultural, environmental and individual differences factors that affect second language acquisition, analyzes the causes of foreign language anxiety and its impact on second language acquisition. And then elaborate the solution of foreign language anxiety from the different perspectives of teachers and learners. This paper has three chapters, including an overview of foreign language anxiety, the causes of foreign language anxiety and its impact on second language acquisition, as well as solutions to foreign language anxiety. Through research on the relationship between foreign language anxiety and second language acquisition, the author found that due to individual differences in learners, the reasons for their foreign language anxiety are different, and the impact of foreign language anxiety on them is also different. So both teachers and learners must adopt appropriate ways to mitigate the negative impact of foreign language anxiety on second language acquisition process.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, emotional factors, second language acquisition

1. Introduction

Educators have always been committed to improving the effectiveness of foreign language teaching, and for a long time people have focused on improving teaching methods. Since the 1970s, language researchers have gradually realized that it is not enough to only focus on students' cognitive abilities and the transmission of knowledge in the process of second language acquisition, and the impact of emotional factors on second language acquisition cannot be underestimated. Since then, foreign language teaching research has gradually shifted from the teacher level to the learners. How to learn a language well has become part of how to teach a language well.

Anxiety is a stringent state that occurs when an individual faces an aversive situation. This state affects the individual's activities and function exertion by changing the individual's thinking process. Foreign language anxiety generated during the second language acquisition process will affect the learner's immediate performance status by affecting the learner's thinking activity, and

long-term foreign language anxiety will reduce the learner's self-confidence and even affect their mental health.

Therefore, it has important enlightenment and guidance significance to study the impact of anxiety on second language acquisition and scientifically analyze how teachers and learners should deal with foreign language anxiety.

2. Definition and Classification of Language Anxiety

With the development of humanistic psychology, emotional factors in education are receiving increasing attention. From the 1970s to the 1980s, research on second language acquisition theory gradually emerged. Researchers found that there are many factors that affect second language learning, and language anxiety is the most prominent factor among many factors that impact learners' learning process and learning efficiency, and is also one of the biggest emotional barriers in language learning.

2.1. Definition of Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety is a complex emotion that typically manifests as sadness, tension, and panic, which associated with events that are difficult to predict and handle. [1] For example, when a language learner suddenly asked to answer a question in class, he may experience anxiety due to concerns about his performance. Anxiety can be divided into trait anxiety, state anxiety, and specific situational anxiety.

Krashen listed anxiety as a factor affecting second language acquisition in his affective filtering hypothesis.[2] In linguistics, foreign language anxiety refers to the anxiety and fear of making mistakes that learners experience during the process of second language acquisition due to their inability to achieve expected goals or overcome psychological barriers. Although foreign language anxiety is an irresistible negative factor in the process of language learning, appropriate foreign language anxiety can also trigger learners to strive to overcome difficulties and become a driving force to challenge new learning tasks, thereby improving the efficiency of second language acquisition.

2.2. Classification of Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety is a specific situational anxiety. According to Horwitz's theory, foreign language anxiety can be divided into social anxiety, exam anxiety, and negative evaluation anxiety.[3]

Individuals who have social anxiety are afraid of making a fool of themselves in front of others and are afraid of being observed by others. Before participating in any collective activity, they unconsciously imagine themselves making a fool of themselves in front of others, thus feeling extremely nervous and anxious. When standing in front of others, they feel even more unnatural. Every time the activity is over, they will recall their unnatural appearance at the party. This creates a nauseating cycle of anxiety. This type of person also perform the same in the process of second language acquisition. If they encounter a scene where they need to showcase their second language, they will unconsciously feel anxious which includes imagining images of themselves speaking a second language influently and with incorrect pronunciation, showing their second language in front of others with nervousness and not meeting their expectations. And even after the presentation, they need to carefully recall which pronunciation they just made was not accurate enough, and any sentences that were not expressed fluently will be lingering in their minds.

Exam anxiety is a psychological reaction of anxiety and tension towards exam results that arises from the face of exams. Exam anxiety usually occurs before exams, and candidates will realize that

exams pose a potential threat to themselves, resulting in a psychological experience of anxiety. In the process of second language acquisition, exam anxiety not only exists in exams, but also in daily classroom tests and questioning sessions. Second language learners with this mentality may doubt their ability to cope with upcoming tests, and the resulting anxiety often affects their performance in tests due to physiological changes such as memory impairment and delayed thinking.

Students are particularly affected by negative evaluation anxiety in the classroom. [4] There are generally two reasons for the formation of negative evaluation anxiety. One is the fear of potential negative evaluations from others. The second is that someone's evaluation of himself is too negative, believing that he is not good at communicating with others and that others also feel the same way. People with such a mentality tend to be extremely concerned about their own performance in the process of second language acquisition. When encountering situations where they need to communicate with others, they always anxiously rehearse communication scenes in advance to avoid the formation of awkward situations. If encountering urgent communication situations, such as being asked questions by teachers in class, they will become anxious and nervous because they are afraid of negative evaluation being directly spoken out by classmates or teachers or generating negative evaluations in their hearts due to their poor performance

3. The Relationship Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Second Language Acquisition

In the 1980s, Horwitz first proposed the concept of Foreign language anxiety. He believed that Foreign language anxiety is a unique synthesis of self perception, beliefs, emotions, and behavior that arises from the connection between the foreign language learning process and classroom foreign language learning. [3]

3.1. The Cause of Foreign Language Anxiety

Second language acquisition is a very complex process that is not only influenced by cultural and environmental factors, but also by differences in second language learners' own learning abilities. In this process, the inherent differences between different languages and the individual differences of foreign language learners themselves can lead to anxiety in second language acquisition.

3.1.1.Cultural Differences Between Chinese and English

Due to various factors such as history, geography, philosophy, and values, there have been significant differences between Chinese and Western cultures since ancient times. In the process of cultural development, differences in customs, expression habits, ways of thinking, and values gradually manifest in language. In the process of second language acquisition, culture shock may reduce the sense of identity, thereby affecting the progress of cross-cultural communication and affecting the efficiency of language learning. [5]

3.1.2.Characteristics of Language Learning

Due to the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of language and language learning, people may experience many difficulties in the learning process. [6] when learners encounter unfamiliar words or grammatical structures during the learning process, many learners tend to focus too much attention on a particular word or language phenomenon, which affects their overall understanding or expression of the language. When learners compare themselves with other learners or idealized self-expression, if others perform better than themselves or their own performance does not meet their ideal state, many learners will avoid or refuse to express their thoughts, which leads to the cause of anxiety.

3.1.3. The Impact of Self Esteem and Confidence

Generally speaking, in the process of second language acquisition, students with high self-esteem and low self-confidence are prone to falling into anxiety and unable to extricate themselves. Whether self-esteem is too strong or self-confidence is insufficient, it can lead to learners having a biased understanding of their abilities, leading to fear of making mistakes in the language learning process and causing anxiety. The most effective method in language learning is to actively use the acquired language to communicate with others. However, many learners have a strong self-esteem and believe that making mistakes in language expression is equivalent to making a fool of themselves. Some learners may lack confidence in expressing themselves, believing that their language ability is limited from the bottom of their hearts, and are afraid of making mistakes in expressing and communicating. Over time, it can lead to anxiety.

3.1.4. The Impact of Learning Habits and Teaching Assessment Models

Most Chinese students in middle school mainly focus on the spelling of words and sentence structure, without effective audio-visual and oral training. However, in the process of English learning in college, more attention is paid to the inspection and training of students' listening and speaking skills. The transformation of teaching methods makes it difficult for students to adapt in a short period of time, leading to anxiety. Chinese schools have long focused on written and oral test scores in their assessments, and students' concerns about grades can also cause anxiety.

3.2. The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Second Language Acquisition

In real life, almost everyone has experienced anxiety. Especially when faced with setbacks, people are more susceptible to being influenced by anxiety, resulting in negative consequences. Not only that, the ubiquitous contrast in life can also cause anxiety, such as high expectations of oneself or better people around oneself.

The impact of anxiety on second language acquisition is complex. Some scholars believe that anxiety is a positive factor for language learners. Maintaining a certain level of anxiety during language learning tasks helps learners maintain composure and composure, rather than being overly relaxed or excited. But for most students whose psychological qualities are not particularly good, anxiety can put them in an overly tense state during the language learning process, wasting time on unnecessary worries and suspicions, thereby affecting their enthusiasm for learning a second language.

4. Solutions to Foreign Language Anxiety

In order to ensure the learning efficiency of foreign language learners, both teachers and learners need to pay attention to the impact of anxiety. Language teachers should be good at observing students' emotional changes, and learners should also try to avoid the negative effects of anxiety from their own perspective.

4.1. Perspectives of Language Teachers

In order to improve the learning efficiency of second language learners and alleviate students' language learning anxiety, teachers need to pay attention to learners' emotions and guide them to manage anxiety in daily life. In addition to providing guidance on language learning skills to students, language teachers should also create a good language learning environment for students and try to change the pursuit of perfect language learning goals from the learners' heart, and guide the learners to establish a learning mode of continuous trial and error correction.

In the process of practical operation, teachers should reexamine their language teaching concepts, including the role of teachers, attitudes towards students who make mistakes, and classroom teaching strategies. The first step for teachers is to aware their harmful teaching manners towards students. [7] By treating students' language mistakes with a tolerant attitude and encouraging and even praising them [8] we can cultivate students' confidence in language learning and stimulate their interest in learning. In addition to imparting knowledge, teachers should also become helpers, guides, facilitators, participants, and collaborators for students' learning. Engage in more communication and interaction can make teachers become students' learning partners. Teachers should carry out low pressure teaching activities in a timely manner, such as watching movies, performing, and debating. This type of activity can help create a healthy, upward oriented, relaxed and harmonious learning atmosphere, thereby helping learners reduce anxiety and enhance confidence. [9]

4.2. Perspectives of Learners

For language learners themselves, in order to alleviate the impact of anxiety on their second language acquisition, they firstly need to clarify their own goals and find their motivation for learning.

When setting language learning goals, learners should not be too strict with their own requirements. Learners should be aware that language learning is a complex and slow process, and understand that language learning cannot be rushed to success. If they demand too much from themselves, it is inevitable that they will experience a sense of lag and anxiety. Learners should focus on the progress they have made and gain motivation to continue learning from their small progress. Students need to cultivate their self-learning ability and find effective and suitable learning strategies. Effectively regulating one's own learning strategies helps students improve their learning methods, achieve good learning outcomes, and thus reduce anxiety in language learning. Learners should also consciously cultivate their ability to be discouraged, strive to ignore the anxiety in learning, and not let small mistakes affect their enterprising spirit.

In the process of language learning, students should focus more on the learning objectives rather than their own performance. For example, when practicing oral English, one should focus on how to explain the content clearly, rather than focusing too much on the use of specific vocabulary and the fluency of sentences. When learners focus on application and expression, rather than focusing too much on fundamental issues such as language structure, they will gain a better language learning experience.

Students should also take the initiative to communicate in second language, because interacting or doing speaking exercises is a good way to reduce anxiety. [10] Through communication or speaking practice, students will feel more familiar with the second language and more aware of their own performance when speaking a second language.

5. Conclusions

In the process of second language acquisition, foreign language anxiety is one of the emotional factors. Its occurrence is not only affected by the learning environment and the learner's cultural background, but also depends on the learner's views on language learning and the learner's own learning ability. Although the complexity of language and cultural differences will greatly hinder learners' foreign language learning, the fundamental cause of foreign language anxiety is the sense of unevenness caused by the mismatch between learners' learning goals and learning abilities. Long-term anxiety will have a great negative impact on learners' self-esteem and self-confidence, which in turn will lead to learners' low learning mood and declining learning state. When language

teachers help students with their language learning, in addition to giving students guidance on learning skills to improve students' learning effects to reduce anxiety, they should also guide students to recognize their own learning abilities in their hearts and establish appropriate learning goals, thereby essentially reducing the occurrence of language learning anxiety. Learners need to find their own motivation for learning and set their goals on long-term progress instead of focusing too much on small mistakes. Anxiety occurs frequently in the process of foreign language learning. Neither learners nor teachers can completely prevent the occurrence of foreign language anxiety. In the second language learning process, while trying to reduce the occurrence of foreign language anxiety, we should also reasonably face the negative impact caused by foreign language anxiety.

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