



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

System

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/system

The roles of social anxiety, autonomy, and learning orientation in second language learning: A structural equation modeling analysis



Mingming Zhou

Faculty of Education, University of Macau, Av. Padre Tomas Pereira, Taipa, Macau

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 September 2015

Received in revised form 12 September 2016

Accepted 13 September 2016

Keywords:

Social anxiety

Autonomy

Collaborative learning orientation

Second language learning

Gender

ABSTRACT

This study examined a model of second language learning in which performance depends not only on students' motivation and emotion, but also on classroom learning orientation. A questionnaire was completed by 303 fifth-grade students in China on social anxiety, autonomy, collaborative learning orientation and self-reported English scores in their last exam. A structural equation modeling analysis of the proposed model showed that students who experienced social anxiety in language learning (in particular, a fear of public speaking) felt less autonomous, held weaker orientations of collaborative learning, and were less successful in their English learning. The results also showed that students' autonomy had both a direct and an indirect effect (via collaborative learning orientation) on language learning. Despite gender differences in self-determined motivation and collaborative learning orientation, the conceptual model did not appear to be different across genders. Implications of the findings are discussed.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Second language (L2) learning process was more complex, nonlinear, dynamic, social, and variable than had been recognized (Larsen-Freeman, 2007). Recent theorization about L2 learning has started to be examined through the lens of dynamic systems theory (DST, Dörnyei, 2009), an overarching theory that allows us to account for cognitive, affective, and social aspects of language development by providing a coherent approach to various issues in L2 learning (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007). Grounded upon the “trilogy of the mind” (see Mayer, Chabot, & Carlsmith, 1997), the three components of human mental functioning (i.e., cognition, emotion and motivation) comprise the subsystems of DST that “have continuous dynamic interaction with each other and cannot exist in isolation from one another (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 235).” By examining the intricate relationships among these subsystems, we could gain a better understanding of how some common issues in L2 learning could be reinterpreted from a DST perspective. Unfortunately, the literature on the application of DST in L2 learning is fairly limited (De Bot et al., 2007). Further, gender issues in L2 learning has caught attention as girls exhibited different learning processes and outcomes from boys in learning language (Farley, Ramonda, & Liu, 2012; Pahom, Farley, & Ramonda, 2015).

In this study, learning orientation, learner autonomy and social anxiety were examined within a single framework on Chinese young learners' L2 learning. These three constructs were chosen from each component of human mental functioning

E-mail address: mmzhou@umac.mo.

(as stated in the dynamic systems theory) because of the extensive research conducted on each construct separately, yet with a lack of integrated investigation of all three together. Further, these variables and the relationships among them were examined across the gender groups, as past research has shown gender differences in social anxiety, learning orientation, and autonomy in academic settings.

To examine this new integrated framework, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied. SEM is a multivariate statistical technique used to examine the complex relationships among variables by creating a theoretical model of such relationships (Walker & Maddan, 2008). As Dörnyei (2001b) posited, the technique was appropriate for testing models involving various complex, interrelated variables, which is exactly the case with issues in L2 learning. I concur with Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) that SEM has been underutilized in L2 research and thus more attempts are needed to examine how they interact with each other to affect language learning outcomes (Liu & Zhang, 2013) with more advanced analytic strategies.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Autonomy

Many researchers have noted that young learners' motivational orientation has a substantial influence on foreign language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2001a) because it “provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the second language and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117). Much of the recent research in this area has focused on the importance of self in school children's language learning motivation (e.g., Benson, 2013; Csizér & Magid, 2014; Mercer & Williams, 2012). For example, the self-determination theory details the role of the self in one's motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) defined self-determination as “the quality of human functioning that involves the experience of choice ... [and] an internal perceived locus of control” (p. 38). This experience of choice is captured in the concept of autonomy, the feeling that one performs an activity due to one's own will or personal desire, with no external pressure. An enormous amount of research shows that self-determination (i.e., autonomy) starts to play a key role in enhancing learning as early as elementary school (Black & Deci, 2000; Lim & Chai, 2004).

Self-determination theory (SDT) outlines a continuum on which learners experience different levels of autonomy and regulate their learning processes accordingly. At one end of the continuum is the intrinsic motivation that leads students to choose an activity “in the absence of a reward contingency or control” (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 34). Intrinsically motivated students enjoy the greatest amount of autonomy as the choice to learn is made through their own will. At the other end is extrinsic motivation, which involves a range of regulation subtypes with differing degrees of autonomy. Specifically, externally regulated learners perform an activity for an external reward or to avoid punishment. Introjected regulated learners carry out an activity due to inner pressure, such as a sense of guilt. Learners with identified regulation choose an activity for personally relevant reasons, which helps them to internalize the external reasons because they accept them as their own. Learners with integrated regulation exhibit the highest levels of autonomy within extrinsic motivation by integrating the process of learning into their selves (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

2.2. Social anxiety

Scholars have argued that L2 learning differs from learning other school subjects because it is more “socially and culturally bound” (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 4) and thus more anxiety-provoking (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The anxiety that stems from social interaction with a focus on language use is thus remarkable, because language use intended as an interactive communication medium depends on an individual's ability to make sense of the other's mental state and to coordinate with one another in successful turn-taking (Verga & Kotz, 2013). This is especially true in Chinese classrooms. In China, despite the great emphasis on English education, Chinese learners' English competence in interacting with foreigners is still low due to the lack of sufficient practice and training in the curriculum (Lu & Hsu, 2008). Hence, people with decent reading and writing skills may be experiencing a great degree of anxiety and difficulties in communicating in English.

As language learning requires social interaction (Verga & Kotz, 2013), complaints are often heard about language learners' difficulty of speaking in public and feel apprehensive about communicating (Aydin, 2013a, 2013b), because they cannot present themselves as well in the new language as they can in their native language (Horwitz et al., 1986). Leary and Kowalski (1995) defined social anxiety as the fear that “occurs when people become concerned about how they are being perceived and evaluated by others” (p. 6). It includes, for example, fear of social communication, fear of public speaking and typical thoughts/behaviors associated with social phobia (Cederlund & Öst, 2013), with the first two being the main contributors to anxiety in L2 learning (Woodrow, 2006). Unfortunately, compared to the large body of research in L2 learning anxiety (e.g., Park & French, 2013; Rassaei, 2015; Salehi & Marefat, 2014), research that particularly focuses on social anxiety was quite limited. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) further pointed out that anxiety during foreign language learning is more prevalent among adults than young learners, which partly explains the scarcity of empirical studies in this regard with young learners. Therefore, it is important to examine how this emotional state interferes with cognitive processing during language learning (Sellers, 2000; Zheng, 2008), especially with young language learners.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941462>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941462>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)