

From Anxiety to Articulation:

Harmonizing Cognitive and Socio-Cultural Dimensions in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

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ABSTRACT

Anxiety is considered one of the most persistent obstacles for beginners in learning a second language. The paper tries to elucidate the major cause of anxiety while uttering second language, and examines the actual reasons for effective barriers. The objective of the research includes how the cognitive factors are interconnected with anxiety. The study also analyses the essential need for socio-cultural interaction in reducing anxiety while inculcating language. The research throws light on theoretical perspectives, especially under cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions. The research includes theories such as Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Model, Control-Value theory of Achievement Emotions, Cognitive Load theory, and Socio-Cultural theory. The paper deals with an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach as methodology. The methodological tools include the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and socio-cultural dimensions tools. The ultimate goal of the research is to

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establish a transition from learner inhibition to language proficiency. The research findings aim to resolve the problem and provide a solution to reduce anxiety among beginners. Future research may also deal with a neuroscientific approach.

Keywords: Cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions, Second language acquisition, Willingness to communicate, Foreign language classroom anxiety scale.

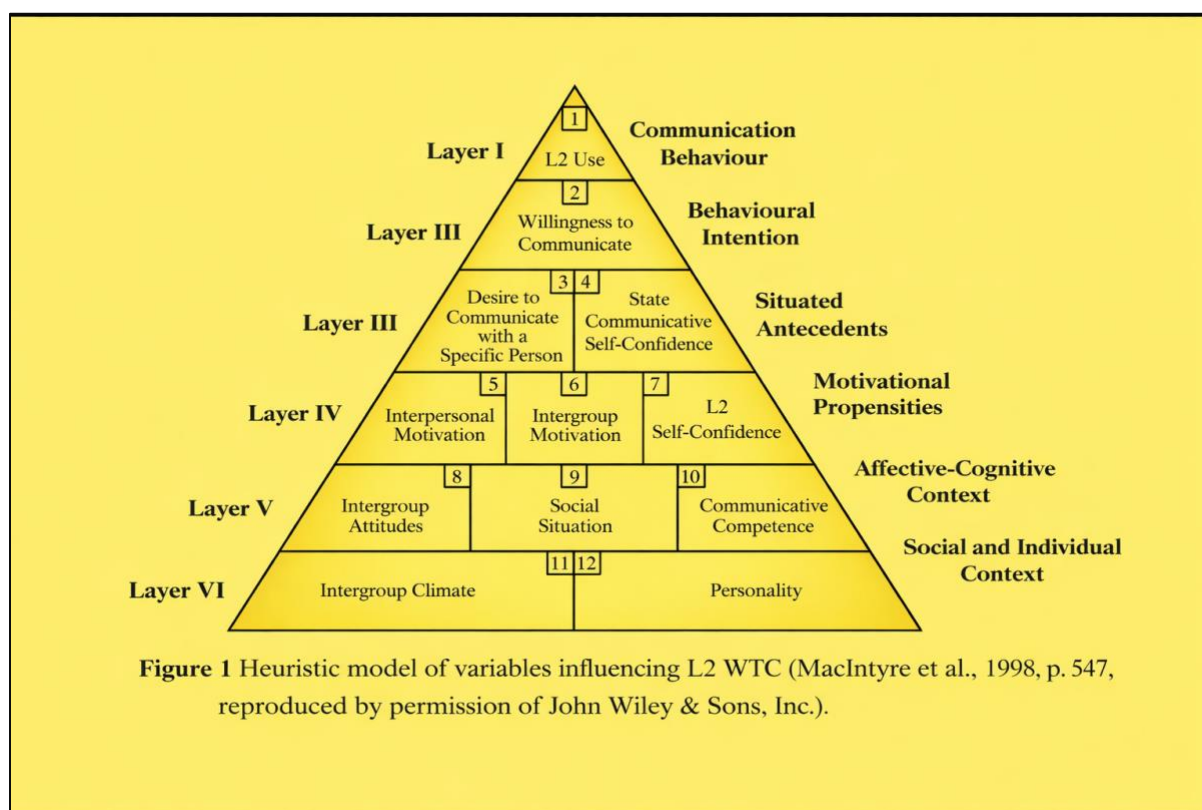
Introduction

Anxiety is one of the most common problems faced by learners while uttering language, “foreign language anxiety significantly affects the domains of language achievement, learners’ actual proficiency and performance, gender, prior foreign language experience, negative evaluation, and self-evaluation” (Mede and Karairmak 119). In other words, anxiety can be defined as, “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (Maclyntyre and Gardner 284). A person might be well-versed in written communication and require standard proficiency. But there might be a drastic decline while uttering language. The situation occurs because of a lack of confidence, hesitation, and constant thinking about others’ opinion, and fear of making mistakes while expressing one’s thoughts. Anxiety can be defined as “Anxiety experienced in communication in English can be debilitating and can influence students’ adaptation to the target environment and ultimately the achievement of their educational goals” (Woodrow 309). Anxiety can be converted into fearless articulation only with the help of practice. First of all, a learner tends to adapt themselves to interactive practices.

Theoretical Aspects

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Model

The Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Model was formulated by James C. McCroskey & Virginia P. Richmond around the mid-1980s and 1990s. The model was proposed to explain how various psychological, social and contextual factors interact to influence a learner's willingness to communicate in the target language, “MacIntyre et.al. (1998) conceptualised L2 WTC as the outcome of an interplay of diverse factors, such as social and individual context, affective and cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, and behavioural intentions” (Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak 247).



WTC also deals with social psychological perspectives, “Although WTC studies adopting a social psychological perspective have focused on diverse attitudinal constructs, they have commonly explored learners’ psychological tendencies to use the L2 within a broad social or even imagined international

context” (Peng 8). On the other hand, it has multiple faces: “WTC can be approached from multiple interacting angles; higher WTC can be seen as a result of successful language instruction, an integral part of the learning process and an emergent state reflecting learner psychology” (MacIntyre and Wang 879).

The Willingness model consists of the following layers namely:

i) Layer I: Communication Behaviour

The first layer deals with the concept of how to use a second language in a specific situation. In this stage, learners get clarity about the context

ii) Layer II: Behavioural Intention (Willingness to Communicate)

The second layer deals with the behavioural pattern. In this stage, learners are asked how to converse with specific people at a specific moment.

iii) Layer III: Situated Antecedents

The third level deals with psychological aspects, that consists of ‘Desire to Communicate with a Specific Person and State of Communicative Self-Confidence’. The actual interest about the context has been achieved and learners get motivated at this stage. At this level, the learners are asked to actively participate in the tasks and express their thoughts without any hesitation. The learners are encouraged by the educators with positive feedback which helps them to reduce anxiety, “During the process of learning a foreign language when the learners are motivated by the instructor the learning takes place with ease and provides learners comfortable environment that enables them not to have antagonistic attitude towards foreign language or its learning (Nadeem 65).”

iv) Layer IV: Motivational Propensities

Layer four deals with Motivational Propensities such as Long-term motivations. These Long-term motivations include interpersonal and intergroup motivation. Motivation can probably be defined as, “the processes that can (a) arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior” (Wlodowski 2).

v) Layer V: Affective- Cognitive Context

Affective-Cognitive Context addresses social situations and communicative competence, “These involves intergroup attitudes, communicative experience, and communicative competence. Intergroup attitudes entail the concept of integrativeness. A likely powerful motive for an individual to learn a second language has been known as the desire to mix identity with the members of second language community” (Jafari and Deghati 691).

vi) Layer VI: Social and Individual Context

The final layer deals with the learner's personality traits and attitudes, “This experience may become part of a generalized attitude concerning the pleasantness of speaking in the L2, but we would suggest that there is also considerable variation according to the type of the communicative event. For example, a university professor may confidently lecture in the L2, yet become extremely shy when talking on the phone to a L2 speaker; another professor might find it easy to use the L2 with his or her peers in a casual conversation, but become blocked in a more formal context” (MacIntyre et al. 22).

Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions

The Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions was proposed by Reinhard Pekrun. The theory deals with how emotions influence learning and academic performance, “The theory posits that

achievement emotions depend on the interplay of perceived control and perceived value. Succinctly stated, achievement emotions are thought to be prompted when feeling in control over, or out of control of, important achievement activities and their outcomes” (Pekrun 11). The theory deals with two key points, namely Control and Value. In addition, Control deals with the ability to complete tasks and value focuses on the importance of task. For instance, the educator assigned a task, i.e., prepare an extempore speech for the particular topic ‘Flood’ to the learners. If the learners think that they can complete the given task, then the learner attains high control. Similarly, if the learners understand that they can improve their learning skills within the task, then they tend to attain high value. Positive aspects come under high control and high value whereas negative aspects come under low control and low value. Positive aspects help in reducing anxiety among learners.

Cognitive Load Theory

Acquiring a second language is considered to be a multifaceted approach that involves cognitive factors as well. Anxiety in beginners can also be reduced with an understanding of the Cognitive Load theory. It is essential to understand that the human brain has a limited capacity to process information. The budding learners can face hurdles because of too much syllabus, which leads to the brain being overloaded. In this case, the learning process remains incomplete. The educators should design the syllabus according to the level of the learners.

Cognitive load denotes the mental exertion necessary for completing a task or comprehending new knowledge. It is a central concept in educational psychology that explores how learners process and retain information. According to cognitive load theory,

there are three kinds of cognitive load that impact learning: Intrinsic cognitive load, Extraneous cognitive load, and Germane cognitive load (Chandrika and Ambedkar103).

Cognitive load theory deals with three factors, namely Intrinsic cognitive load, Extraneous cognitive load and Germane cognitive load. Intrinsic cognitive load deals with innate complexity and requires more intricate. It also focuses on how to assign task difficulty according to the level of learners. Extraneous cognitive load asserts that, “As originally articulated, the word “extraneous” is never explicitly stated in conjunction with cognitive load but is indirectly referenced as “measures” that are “presumably irrelevant to schema acquisition” because they are not critical to new schema induction” (Sweller 282). Germane cognitive load can be defined as “germane cognitive load would involve the learning activities and mental processes that attempt to connect information to long-term knowledge schemas in a constructivist manner, such as using mnemonic devices, activating prior knowledge, etc” (Clark and Kimmons 110).

Sociocultural Theory

The process of language learning from anxiety to articulation can be elevated through the implementation of cognitive and sociocultural dimensions. Furthermore, within the framework of Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory the anxiety of beginners can be gradually diminished through interactive learning circumstances. For instance, a child born with siblings tends to speak faster than a single child. Similarly, the interaction plays a crucial role in second language acquisition. Activities such as oral-based tasks, dialogue conversation practice, group discussions, and role-play provide a vast exposure for learners to practice language. This sort of practice helps learners to actively participate in the completion of tasks as well as helps to reduce their anxiety level.

Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory admits that learning language is associated with social interaction and cultural experience. Socio-cultural theory affirms that "Vygotsky (1986) proposed socio-cultural theory (SCT), a new perspective was presented regarding the relationship between human beings' cognitive development and language learning" (Mirzaee and Maftoon 2). In other words, "Vygotsky argued that language is key to the development of the psychological system that constitutes the human mind. In fact, the meaning-making potential of language is not inherent in the words themselves but built 'on the fly' and constitutive of the historically and culturally shared meanings that make up the lived environment" (Johnson, Golombek, and Rieker 6). Vygotsky exemplifies that language plays a major role in the development of the human mind. He also confesses that words do not hold fixed meanings; rather than meaning can be determined in real-life experiences as well as shaped by culture or history.

Methodology & Methodological Tools

The mixed method approach deals with analysing and collecting data with the integration of qualitative and quantitative data. "Using mixed methodology can help blend different approaches, allowing the researcher to design research questions within the context and parameters of their study" (Bowen, Rose, and Pilkington 11). To collect data for future research, researchers can use questionnaires, pretest and post-test activities, photo narrative tasks and post-task interviews. Methodological tools include the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), "has been used as an influential instrument to measure foreign language anxiety (FLA) in classrooms for various research purposes worldwide for four decades" (Yuce, Aydin, and Arat 1), a popular questionnaire that consists of thirty-three items developed by Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz and Joann Cope in 1986 to measure the level of anxiety in language learners. It consists of a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree to analyse communication apprehension and fear of negative feedback.

Conclusion

The role of the teacher is highly applicable to reducing anxiety in the language classroom. The learners have to feel comfortable in the language classroom to express their thoughts. The classroom should be an interactive environment rather than monotonous circumstances, “But most of the teachers prefer one way communication. The students were compelled to follow the rote learning method in order to get good marks in English examination” (Rathina Prabhu et al.219). The educator has to motivate each and every learner. The teacher should identify the cause for anxiety and find a solution to the causes, “Teachers can administer it at the beginning of the school year or at the beginning of the academic program to assess anxiety in students and bring up the issue of anxiety for discussion” (Al-Saraj 67). The future of the study deals with a neuroscientific approach. The paper tries to justify the cause of anxiety and how to overcome it in an effective language learning classroom.

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