

The Effects of Affective Factors in SLA and Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract—Affective factors are the most important factors in SLA and English teaching. These factors include emotion, feeling, mood, manner, attitude and so on. All these factors, especially, motivation, self-confidence and anxiety, decide the input and output of the second language. Under the guidance of the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen, the present paper makes a survey on advanced English majors. By collecting and analyzing research data, some useful results and implications have been found and can be used in future teaching. The affective factors will surely help the teachers to improve their teaching quality and students to cultivate an all-round development.

Index Terms—affective factors, motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, implication

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent work in applied linguistics has extended the study of psychology beyond the teaching of English itself. The concept of “psychology” itself is certainly not a new one. What is new, however, is the interest in the analysis of the effect of affective factors in English study and its implications in English teaching. With the development of applied linguistics and psychological analysis, linguists are no longer satisfied with surface-level linguistic description, but turn to seek deeper psychological factors, that is, affective factors in English learning.

“Learners’ affective factors are obviously of crucial importance in accounting for individual differences in learning outcomes. Whereas learners’ beliefs about language learning are likely to be fairly stable, their affective states tend to be volatile, affecting not only overall progress but responses to particular learning activities on a day-by day and even moment-by-moment basis.” (Ellis, 1994, p. 483)

The object of this study is to improve the methods of English teaching and figure out a short way for the students to learn English. The affective factors are important parts influencing English learning. And this study is meant to analyze the psychological factors in psycholinguistic field and apply them to English teaching.

II. RESEARCH ON AFFECTIVE FACTORS

A. *Affective Filter Hypothesis*

Early in 1870’s, Dulay and Burt had proposed the Affective Filter Hypothesis and explained its influence on the foreign language learning process. Later, Krashen(1982, P. 31) developed and made the hypothesis perfect. He put the theory into five central hypotheses in second language acquisition (hereafter SLA), namely, the Acquisition-learning distinction; the Natural order hypothesis; the Monitor hypothesis; the Input hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen argued that affective filter is a kind of psychological obstacle that prevents language learners from absorbing available comprehensible input completely. He looked affective factors functioning as a filter that reduces the amount of language input the learner is able to understand. It has a close relationship with the language learner’s input and intake. It can be said that affective factors determine the proportion of language learners’ input and intake. The affective factors include certain emotions, such as motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and so on in the process of acquiring a second language. These negative emotions prevent efficient processing of the language input, and on the contrary, the positive emotions promote the efficiency of the process. When language learners with high motivation, self-confidence and a low level of anxiety, they have low filters and so receive and take in plenty of input. On the other hand, learners with low motivation, little self-confidence and a high level of anxiety have high filters and therefore obtain little input. The Affective Filter Hypothesis shows that the emotional factors strongly affect the learners’ input and how much input is converted into intake. The Affective Filter Hypothesis has significant implications for foreign language teaching. A low filter should be created and advocated for the effective language teaching. It can be guessed that learners’ affective filters will be influenced by teachers’ feedback. Attempts should be made to lower the affective filter and let learners feel less stressed and more confident in a comfortable learning atmosphere.

It has a long history about interest in affective factors in education abroad. Since 1970s, the interest in the field of foreign language learning and teaching has been raised. Inferences of affective factors have become the major concern in this research field. Many researchers have stressed the importance of understanding affective factors in second language learning. For example, Arnold (2000, P. 2) gives out two reasons to explain the importance. Firstly, “attention

to affective aspects can lead to more effective language learning". Secondly, attention to affective aspects can contribute to the whole-person development, which is "beyond language teaching and even beyond what has traditionally been considered the academic realm". It can be deduced that affective factors do play a significant role in both foreign language learning and teaching. Three factors: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety have been chosen to state their important functions.

B. Motivation

Motivation is considered to be one of the most important factors, which affect the learner's language input and intake. H. Brown (2001, P. 34) defined it as, "Motivation is the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit." Gardner (1985) explained it as a combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitude towards learning the language. Analyzing what he calls "learner factors", Jakobovits (1970) divided into four sets of factors: aptitude, intelligence, perseverance or motivation, and other factors. These factors account for the various degrees of success or failure for a foreign language learner. Leon Jakobovits set up the following Table. 1 of the percentage of these four categories:

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Aptitude | 33% |
| Intelligence | 20% |
| Perseverance or motivation | 33% |
| Other factors | 14% |

From the table above, it is obvious that the third category (perseverance or motivation) comes out with the same high percentage as aptitude and it is higher than intelligence factor.

The concept of motivation has been defined in various ways. Ramage (1990, p. 189) pointed out that "identifying students' motivations for foreign language learning was a prerequisite to developing interventions that promote interest and continuation in foreign language study". What's more, Williams and Burden (1997) proposed, Motivation involved sustaining interest and investing time and energy into putting in the necessary effort to achieve certain goals. To sum up, motivation is the process by which goal-directed behavior is stimulated in language learning. It drives and directs behavior.

Research shows that motivation directly and profoundly influences how often students use foreign language learning (FLL) strategies; how much input they receive in the language being learned; how high their general proficiency level becomes; and how long they persevere and maintain FLL skills after language study is over (Oxford, 1992).

C. Self-confidence

Self-confidence is considered to be another significant factor, which profoundly influences the learners' language performance. The students who lack of confidence are usually found to be extremely fearful and timid, reluctant to express their opinions and even unable to utter a complete meaningful sentence in class.

H., Brown (2001, p. 23) phrased this factor as "I can do it" or self-esteem principle, i.e., a learner believes in his or her own ability to accomplish the task. "The eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing the task."

Of all the possible characteristics that can affect language learning, self-confidence is very important for the following reasons. The first reason is that self-confidence will encourage a person to try new learning. One would be willing to take some risks in order to be successful. Another reason is that a confident person rarely gives up. With these abilities, a confident student can succeed in language learning.

Finally, the studies of self-confidence have meaningful implications for language teachers. What should be solved is how to help students to establish and strengthen their self-confidence when they learn the second language. Successful language learning only takes place in an environment where learners' values and positive attitudes are promoted, where learners approach learning with confidence and joy, where learners can use the target language at ease. Therefore, teachers should spare no efforts to create conditions that can be conducive to students' self-confidence.

D. Anxiety

Anxiety is another particular affective factor. It is one of the most prominent and pervasive emotions. According to Arnold (2000, P. 59), language anxiety "ranks high among factors influencing language learning, regardless of whether the setting is informal (learning language 'on the streets') or formal (in the classroom)". Students with anxiety attending the class will feel nervous and afraid to cooperate with teachers and then they cannot concentrate on the learning points and waste their energy or they just want to flee the learning task. According to Krashen (1981, P. 23), "The students who feels at ease in the classroom and likes the teacher may seek out more intake by volunteering ... and may not be more accepting of the teacher as a source of input."

Ellis (1994) divided anxiety into three kinds, i.e., trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. The study of situational anxiety has received considerable attention in SLA research. It consists of the anxiety which is aroused by a specific type of situation or event such as public speaking, examinations, or class participation. Research indicates that learners frequently experience 'language anxiety', a type of situation-specific anxiety associated with attempts to learn an L2 and communicate in it. Second language learners' anxiety is due to their competitive natures. They tend to

become anxious when they compare themselves with other learners in the class and found themselves less proficient. The anxiety will decrease when they perceive themselves becoming more proficient, and therefore better able to compete. Researches also found that teachers' questions and feedbacks to students' answers also threatening.

III. EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

Any theory should base and depend on certain investigation. Only the facts can prove the theory. This chapter provides the methodology of the study; it is divided into research question, subjects, instruments, questionnaire, data collection and analysis. This chapter is a full presentation of the questionnaire investigation.

A. Research Questions

The study aims to find out several useful tips for English majors in their language learning. Based on it, three questions have been brought up for the research as follows:

How do the English majors evaluate their English on the whole?

What're the effects of the affective factors (motivation, self-confidence and anxiety) on their language learning?

What're the attitudes of students toward their teachers' feedback?

B. Subjects and Instrument

Fifty English majors who enrolled Foreign Language Department, Heze University in 2010 are the subjects in this investigation. All of them are the top ten sophomores chosen from the five paralleled classes respectively according to last final examination held at the end of 2011. Most of them have at least ten years English learning experiences. So far they have had more opportunities to interact with their college teachers and naturally have formed relatively stable perceptions about different affective factors when answering the questionnaire. They all cooperated with the researcher to deal with the questionnaires well and seriously, which were to test their attitudes and affective factors toward their English classes.

The questionnaire is adapted partly from that of Zhou Xing and Zhou Yun's (2002), some of the questions have been deleted and some are added. All in all, it is composed of ten items. The first two questions aim to locate the subjects' English level, which can be a basic reference to the following questions. The next five questions were designed to learn about the learners' performances in classroom. They are devised to investigate the factors that prevent students from full class participation and find out the reason why they gain good or bad marks in English tests. All the former eight questions are multiple-choice questions. The ninth and tenth questions are "ask and answer" questions, which are to collect the data of students' true feelings and attitudes when facing difficulties in class. Questions about attitude and preference towards teacher's feedback and guidance are also involved. It is expected that the students can express their true feelings naturally and their answers can reflect their affective factors toward English learning in class. The questionnaire is written in Chinese in case the students have difficulty in understanding each question or expressing their opinions in English. To ensure that they would answer the question items honestly, the subjects responded the questionnaires anonymously.

C. Data Collection and Result Analysis

All the 50 questionnaire copies are collected, among which 45 are effective. In order to ensure the reliability of the survey, 30 of the subjects were asked to do the same test two weeks later. Their answers were basically concord to their former ones.

The 45 left questionnaires were used as data for analysis. The answers to the question items were counted and categorized.

According to the questionnaire survey, the results can be divided into three parts, i.e., the results of self-evaluation of their English level; the analysis of affective factors toward English learning and the analysis of students' preferences for teacher's feedback and guidance.

1. The results of self-evaluation about English

The first item in this part is just about students' self-evaluation of their English level. There are four choices: very good; good; just so so and bad. From the left 45 copies, we can see the answers much clearer in the following Fig. 1.

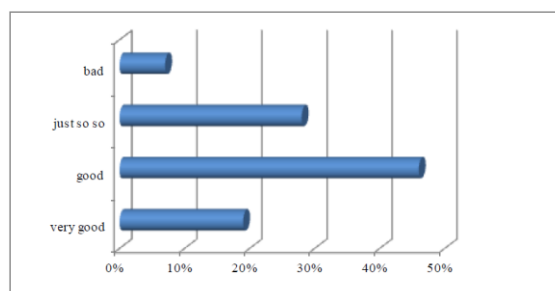


Figure. 1 Students' Self-evaluation about Their English

The distribution of the answers on students' self-evaluation is presented in above chart. As is shown in the chart, the number of students who think their English is "good" has the highest frequency of 46%. Then the number of whose English are "just so so" ranks second with a percentage of 28%. The "very good" evaluation of their English follows next, amounting 19%. The least percentage of students who think their English is "bad" only accounts for 7%. It might suggest that most of the subjects tend to think their English is good. Only few ones think they are bad at it. What's more, it needs to be noted that almost all of the students think they are good at their English. All in all, it sets some basic background information for the next part's analysis. The second item is about "the major factor leading to their current English proficiency". The distribution of answers to the four choices is fairly average. It reveals that the Option A "interest" accounts for 26.7%, which ranks the highest percentage. Option B "self-confidence" amounts 23.5%, which is the lowest percentage. Left choices for C "classroom performance" and D "teacher's role" account for 25.5% and 25.3% respectively. From the answers to item 2, we can deduce that four factors (interest, self-confidence, classroom performance and teacher's role) all play an important part in students' language learning.

2. The results of affective factors in English learning

To make English learning more effective, we should find out the effects of the three major affective factors in the process of English learning. Therefore, it is necessary to examine students' attitudes toward English and get a clearer picture about it. In the questionnaire, subjects were asked several questions about their performances and attitudes in class from classroom performance, interest, motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. The study examines the frequency of the four options chosen by the subjects ranging from totally approval to totally disapproval (far from enough). The number of each options and the corresponding ratios are illustrated as follows (Table. 2),

TABLE. 2
FREQUENCY OF AFFECTIVE FACTORS

| Item | Totally... | Rather... | Not too much... | Far from enough |
|------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| No.3 | 20/44.4% | 18/40.0% | 5/11.1% | 2/4.4% |
| No.4 | 16/35.6% | 22/48.9% | 4/8.9% | 3/6.7% |
| No.5 | 12/26.7% | 23/51.1% | 7/15.6% | 3/6.7% |
| No.6 | 18/40.0% | 22/48.9% | 4/8.9% | 1/2.2% |
| No.7 | 2/4.4% | 3/6.7% | 21/46.7% | 19/42.2% |

As can be seen from the table, answers of item No. 3 and 4 which test the "classroom performance" and "interest" when learning English suggest that the two factors have important influence on language learning. In item No.5, the option "highly-motivated" which amounts to a percentage of 51.1% is the highest rank. It implies that most of the students have got a good motivation of learning English. And it is well accord with their English level from both fact and theory in item No.1. In item No.6, 48.9% of them have "self-confidence", which suggests that about one in two students have confidence in themselves. The result is also consistent with the previous item, in which 19% of the students think their English is "very good". There is a noticeably low percentage of "anxiety" factor in item No.7 in learning English which ranks 11.1% (4.4%+6.7%). It explains that few of them attend classes with anxiety. Most of them have got a good mood in the classes.

According to the results gathered from the questionnaire, most of the students think that the affective factors are of importance to their language learning. The significance of affective factors mentioned by them can be summarized into three major points below:

To start with, motivation directly and profoundly influences how much knowledge they gained from language learning. With high motivation, students have high enthusiasm and spirit in English learning; they can concentrate themselves on study. On the other hand, students who cannot concentrate themselves on study often have low motivation and they do not know the purposes of learning language.

In addition, self-confidence is another important factor, which influences the learners' language performances. Students with much confidence in language learning believe that they have the ability to learn the language well and consequently they will perform very actively in classes and their grades in English are high, and vice versa. All in all, self-confidence means a lot in language learning.

Finally, Students with a low level of anxiety tend to have a comfortable atmosphere in classes, thus they attend class attentively. While students attending classes with a high level of anxiety often worry about their performances in classes.

On the whole, the students hold a positive attitude toward affective factors in terms of its significant part in language learning. Yet some students still have negative attitude toward English learning. If not properly corrected, it will arouse unfavorable affective reactions of the students, which may adversely affect their involvement in the learning activities and thus their language learning. This alerts our teachers on how and when to give proper guidance to students. Teachers should look into the role of affective factors.

3. The analysis of learners' preferences for teacher's feedbacks

The findings of this part have demonstrated how teacher's feedbacks are actually used, and how the students would like it to be. There seems to be a slight mismatch between the teacher's actual practice and the students' perception of the use of feedback. In order to promote students' affective development, some teacher feedback techniques catering for students' need are proposed.

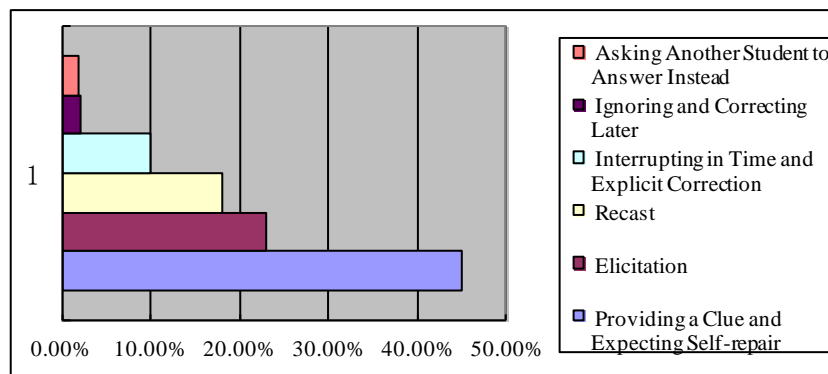


Figure 2. Learners' Preferences for Teacher Feedback

The results of item No. 8 in the questionnaire have shown learners' preferences for certain ways of teacher's feedback. According to statistics above in Fig. 2, the method of "providing a clue and expecting self-repair" is most favored by the students in the sample, with the highest ratio of 44.97%. Besides, the students prefer "elicitation" (23.03%) to other ways of corrective feedback. "Recast" is also desired by 18.07% of the students. As for "interrupting in time and explicit correction", only 9.94% of the students report that they accept it. It is shown that "ignoring and correcting later" and "asking another student to answer instead" are two least preferred ways of error treatment.

There is no better illustration of the students' preferred way of teacher feedback than the findings obtained from the item No. 9 and 10. When asked whether the teacher's feedbacks have any influence on their emotions, the subjects have expressed their sincere hopes. All of them wish that the teachers should point out their weakness and strengths with the method of feedback that they prefer.

As indicated above, the views of the students on their preferences for teacher's feedbacks give us meaningful insight into what the students really need, which can facilitate our language teaching. It implies that teachers need to pay extra attention to affective factors when giving feedback to students. It also suggests that the varying levels of language proficiency of the students cannot be neglected when choosing the method of teacher feedback to promote students' affective development.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion presented above, the findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

With regard to the affective factors in SLA in the classroom under investigation, the present study demonstrates that the affective factors decide the proportion of language learners' input and intake. The excellent students usually have high motivation, much self-confidence and a low level of anxiety, and they receive and take in plenty of language input. It is a pity that there are still some students who learn language with low motivation, little self-confidence and a high level of anxiety, to which teachers should give correct guidance on their affective factors.

The results regarding learners' attitudes toward teacher feedback and guidance show that the majority of learners view teacher feedback and guidance with a positive attitude. However, they are really concerned about the specific way of corrective feedback adopted by teachers. The data have illustrated that teacher feedback and guidance contribute greatly to students' emotional states, especially their motivation, self-confidence and anxiety.

The findings in the present study suggest a number of implications for second language teaching and teachers' training.

To begin with, teachers should take learners' affective factors into full consideration. The results obtained from the study do provide convincing evidence that affective components have a considerable impact on the learners. The way in which learners interpret affective factor information is the key to develop positive and valuable concepts of self-efficacy about learning, which in turns leads to further effective learning. Appropriate teacher guidance and advice will encourage stronger willingness to participate and greater effort to learn on the part of learners, and thereby greater success in language performance. Thus, it is advisable for teachers to adopt some practical and effective techniques to promote learners' affective development and hence get them actively involved in class activities.

It is suggested that more practical researches on affective factors should be carried out in SLA. Further research is advised to investigate whether features of affective factors vary with individuals of the same proficiency level of students. The different features hide deserve further exploration. Moreover, personal differences of students should be given special attention in the further study. The differences in their choosing different teacher guidance would be an interesting research topic.

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