



Review of Research on Foreign Language Anxiety and Foreign Language Enjoyment

Ruoyan Cui

School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Wuhan University, Wuhan 430072, China

Abstract: Research on foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment are reviewed, including those investigating the effect of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment on foreign language performances, those exploring the interrelations among foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment and other learner variables, and those focusing on foreign language anxiety in specific linguistic skills. Foreign language enjoyment in specific linguistic skills needs further empirical investigation and a longitudinal perspective is warranted in further foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment research.

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***Corresponding author:** Ruoyan Cui, 1585374075@qq.com

1 Introduction

“Emotions are short-lived, feeling-arousal-purposive-expressive phenomena that help us adapt to the opportunities and challenges we face during important life events” (MacIntyre & Gregerson, 2012). Myriad studies on emotions and their impact on learning have been conducted in the field of general education (Khajavy, MacIntyre & Barabadi, 2018). In foreign language research, however, studies directly examining emotions are comparatively scarce. Emotions function noticeably in language learning and teaching. Taking emotions into account could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of individual differences in learning a second or foreign

language.

2 Foreign language anxiety

Foreign language anxiety was defined as “the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language” (MacIntyre, 1999: 27, as cited in Dewaele & MacInyre, 2014). Research on foreign language anxiety has undergone three phases of development, the confounded phase, the specialised phrase and the dynamic phase (MacIntyre, 2017).

The confounded phase of foreign language anxiety research has yielded mixed and confusing findings due to lack of conceptualisation of anxiety specific to foreign language learning and inconsistency in measurement. A turning point in foreign language anxiety research is the proposal of foreign language classroom anxiety and the construction of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz and her associates in 1986. They proposed foreign language classroom anxiety, “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986): based on language learners’ description of anxiety-provoking aspects of their courses. FLCAS, with 33 items reflecting learners’ typical experiences in classroom language learning context, is a situation-specific approach to measure language anxiety.

Having established foreign language anxiety as a construct specific to language learning and with a standard scale to measure anxiety, foreign language anxiety research thrives, including those examining anxiety in specific foreign language skills

(e.g. Baran-Łucarz, 2014); those investigating the inter-relationship among foreign language anxiety and other learner variables (e.g. Dewaele, 2013; Dewaele, et al., 2008; Dewaele et al., 2016; Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Khajavy, MacIntyre & Barabadi, 2018); and those exploring the relationship between foreign language anxiety and foreign language achievement (e.g. Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewey, Belnap & Steffen, 2018; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Saito, 2018; Zheng & Cheng, 2018).

2.1 Foreign language anxiety in specific linguistic skills

Baran-Łucarz (2014) explored the relationship between willingness to communicate and pronunciation anxiety of 151 Polish learners of English. Situational variables were involved, including familiarity with interlocutors, group size, task type and target language proficiency. Participants' willingness to communicate was negatively correlated with their pronunciation anxiety. A stronger negative relationship between willingness to communicate and pronunciation anxiety was observed when students learned in large groups instead of small groups or dyads and when they interacted with acquaintances and friends instead of strangers. Willingness to communicate and pronunciation anxiety were negatively correlated across proficiency levels with the strongest link occurring at the intermediate level.

2.2 Foreign language anxiety and other learner variables

The dynamic phase of foreign language anxiety research focuses on the interrelationship among foreign language anxiety and other psychological, cognitive and socio-biographical variables. Dewaele (2013) examined the relationship between personality traits, including psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism, a socio-biographical variable, namely, knowledge of languages and foreign language classroom anxiety in the second, third, and fourth languages of language major undergraduates in University of London and University of Les Illes Balears in Mallorca. Regarding the three personality traits, participants of the Mallorca group with higher levels of extraversion and psychoticism experienced significantly lower levels of foreign language classroom anxiety. In both groups, participants with higher levels of neuroticism experienced significantly

lower levels of foreign language classroom anxiety. With reference to the socio-biographical variable, knowledge of more languages is related to lower levels of foreign language classroom anxiety in the second language of the London group. Foreign language classroom anxiety level is relatively stable across the multilinguals' foreign languages.

2.3 Foreign language anxiety and foreign language achievement

Zheng and Cheng (2018) examined the relationship between Chinese university students' foreign language classroom anxiety, cognitive test anxiety and College English Test Band 4 performances. Foreign language anxiety is subcategorised into three inter-related constructs, including class anxiety, test anxiety and test confidence. Class anxiety and test anxiety are closely related and negatively associated with test confidence. Students with higher test anxiety achieve lower test scores and their peers with less test anxiety obtain significantly higher scores. Test confidence positively predicts test performance with the students having higher levels of test confidence achieving higher test scores.

The study reviewed above focuses on anxiety's impact on language output. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994): however, examined the effect of anxiety on three stages of foreign language learning, including input, processing and output. A video camera was presented prior to the three stages respectively to arouse anxiety in learning French vocabulary. Cognitive deficits were observed when anxiety was provoked at earlier stages of learning, and they could only be solved by returning to the input and processing stages and recovering the missing information.

Overall, anxiety has a debilitating impact on foreign language achievement. Most research on foreign language anxiety in relation to foreign language achievement are cross-sectional by nature. Longitudinal designs exploring the dynamic changes in foreign language anxiety and foreign language proficiency are warranted.

3 Foreign Language Enjoyment

“Much more attention is given to the question of negative emotions... (one) should not lose sight of the importance of developing the positive” (Arnold & Brown, 1999: 2, as cited in Dewaele &

MacIntyre, 2014). With the development of positive psychology, influential works of positive psychology were introduced into second language acquisition which aroused interest in language learners' positive emotions in learning a second or foreign language. Enjoyment is the most researched positive emotion. Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) developed the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) to measure foreign language learners' enjoyment in language learning. Later empirical studies on foreign language enjoyment were conducted using FLES, including those examining the inter-relationship among foreign language enjoyment and other learner variables (e.g. Dewaele et al., 2016; Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Khajavy, MacIntyre & Barabadi, 2018) and those exploring the effect of enjoyment on foreign language achievement (e.g. Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewey, Belnap & Steffen, 2018; Saito, 2018).

3.1 Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language achievement

Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) investigated the effect of foreign language enjoyment on language performances of 189 secondary pupils from two schools in Greater London and of 152 Saudi learners of English. Higher levels of foreign language enjoyment were associated with better test performances.

Generally, foreign language enjoyment and foreign language achievement are positively correlated. Learners experiencing higher levels of foreign language enjoyment have greater chances for improving target language proficiency.

3.2 Foreign language enjoyment and other learner variables

Dewaele et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between foreign language enjoyment, foreign language anxiety and learner, teacher and classroom-specific variables. The learner variables include age, gender, number of languages known, foreign language proficiency, self-perceived standing among peers and attitudes towards the foreign language and the foreign language teacher. The teacher and classroom-specific variables include frequency of a teacher using the foreign language in class, proportion of time students spent on specific linguistic skills and teacher's predictability. Foreign language enjoyment was negatively associated with foreign language

classroom anxiety. The elder participants experienced more foreign language enjoyment. Female participants experienced significantly more foreign language enjoyment than their male peers. More advanced foreign language learners had significantly more foreign language enjoyment. Favourable attitudes towards the foreign language and the foreign language teacher were associated with more foreign language enjoyment. Frequency of a teacher using the foreign language in class had a significant positive effect on foreign language enjoyment. Teacher predictability had a significant negative effect on foreign language enjoyment. In total, learner variables appeared to be stronger influential factors than teacher-related variables for foreign language enjoyment.

Cross-sectional studies on foreign language enjoyment provide a static picture of foreign language enjoyment in relation to other learner variables, foreign language learning is a dynamic process, and learner variables are susceptible to changes. Therefore, a longitudinal perspective is warranted in foreign language enjoyment research.

4 Conclusion

Research on foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment include three branches, those investigating the impact of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment on foreign language achievement; those exploring the interrelationship among foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment and other learner-internal and learner-external variables; and those examining foreign language anxiety in specific linguistic skills. Given that foreign language enjoyment has begun to arouse research attention only recently, further research on foreign language enjoyment in specific linguistic skills are warranted.

Despite of myriad cross-sectional studies on foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment, longitudinal research is few. Cross-sectional studies could only provide a thorough and detailed description of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment at a fixed point of time. Foreign language learning, however, is a dynamic process. Foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment and other learner variables are susceptible to change over time. Therefore, a longitudinal perspective is warranted to obtain a dynamic view of

foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment and their impact on foreign language learning.

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