

Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

Research results over the past decades have consistently demonstrated that a key reason why many second language learners fail--while some learners do better with less effort--lies in various learner attributes such as personality traits, motivation, or language aptitude. In psychology, these attributes have traditionally been called "individual differences." The scope of individual learner differences is broad--ranging from creativity to learner styles and anxiety--yet there is no current, comprehensive, and unified volume that provides an overview of the considerable amount of research conducted on various language learner differences, until now. Each chapter in this new volume focuses on a different individual difference variable. A key concern for the author has been to define the various learner factors as measurable constructs and therefore the discussion includes a summary of the most famous tests and questionnaires in each domain. A key concern for the author has been to define the various learner factors as measurable constructs and therefore the discussion includes a summary of the most famous tests and questionnaires in each domain.

Keywords: second language, differences, individual, learn.

ABSTRAK

Hasil penelitian selama beberapa dekade terakhir secara konsisten menunjukkan bahwa alasan utama mengapa banyak pembelajar bahasa kedua gagal - sementara beberapa pembelajar melakukannya lebih baik dengan sedikit usaha - terletak pada berbagai atribut pembelajar seperti ciri-ciri kepribadian, motivasi, atau bakat bahasa. Dalam psikologi, atribut ini secara tradisional disebut "perbedaan individu". Cakupan perbedaan pembelajar individu sangat luas--mulai dari kreativitas hingga gaya pembelajar dan kecemasan--namun tidak ada volume saat ini, komprehensif, dan terpadu yang memberikan gambaran tentang sejumlah besar penelitian yang dilakukan pada berbagai perbedaan pembelajar bahasa, sampai sekarang . Setiap bab dalam volume baru ini berfokus pada variabel perbedaan individu yang berbeda. Perhatian utama penulis telah mendefinisikan berbagai faktor pelajar sebagai konstruksi terukur dan oleh karena itu diskusi mencakup ringkasan tes dan kuesioner yang paling terkenal di setiap domain. Perhatian utama penulis telah mendefinisikan berbagai faktor pelajar sebagai konstruksi terukur dan oleh karena itu diskusi mencakup ringkasan tes dan kuesioner yang paling terkenal di setiap domain.

Kata kunci: bahasa kedua, perbedaan, individu, belajar.

INTRODUCTIONS

This discusses the individual differences in second language acquisition. There is some difference of opinion concerning the role of individual differences in second language acquisition. One view is that individual variation is an all-important factor—one that differentiates the process of second language acquisition from that of first language acquisition.

The chapter discusses the cognitive and social strategies in second language learning. The cognitive problem facing second language learners is an immense one. The cognitive problems are much more complex: Before the structures of the new language can be learned, the learner needs first to comprehend them. To deal with the task of learning a language that they have been largely unconcerned about learning, the children had to have some rather special cognitive and social strategies. The discusses strategies that were revealed through the interactional and linguistic records of the children. These strategies are both social strategies and cognitive strategies that provide an overview of the individual variation in some phonetic aspects of language acquisition. The theoretical problems associated with individual differences have for long been a focus of psychology. Recently, these problems have received closer scrutiny from investigators concerned with both perceptual and productive aspects of speech processes. It is impossible to do justice to the many varied studies that contribute to an understanding of phonetic factors in the development of speech and language.

The one problem involved in interpreting child data is to determine whether one is examining the transducing capability of the auditory mechanism or whether the perceptual results represent some linguistic capability. It can be summed up that at least the transducing mechanism for linguistic and non-linguistic auditory signals is set for the perceptual process immediately following birth. What is also clear is that individual child speakers may vary considerably in the strategies they use, while still achieving their goals of communication. If one is to add anything of value to already existing phonological descriptions of the language acquisition process, it will require painstaking and arduous physical measurements of perceptual and articulatory activity, in both the acoustic and aerodynamic domains, in a group of willing children across time. Only by performing such measurements will we better be able to understand and interpret the variability that is present in the process.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate what role the ESL and EFL environment plays in L2 learners' pragmatic competence and whether individual differences can have a more effective influence than the constraints of the language-learning environment itself. First, the effect of the environment on developing pragmatic competence will be addressed with regard to the role of pragmatic transfer.

The effect of motivation on pragmatic knowledge will then be discussed, followed by a discussion of the findings and methodological issues in measuring Retrievable at 86 pragmatic competence in ESL and EFL settings. Finally, recommendations for future research as well as important sociological considerations with regard to NS norms will be addressed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Table 1: Factor affecting the learning outcomes

No	Factors	Knowledge To Be Drawn
1	Motivations	To know different motivational factors in L2 learning
2	Age matter	To generalize the idea of appropriate age to learn second language. To also know general views of people about the appropriate of L2 learning
3	Challenges in learning process	To know that what types of challenges are faced during the L2 learning process
4	Facilitating factors	To know what facilitates the people generally in the L2 learning process
5	Personality factors to overcome challenges	To know how people behave to overcome the different challenges during the course of L2 learning.

THE ROLE OF PRAGMATIC TRANSFER

One factor in developing pragmatic competence in an L2 is pragmatic transfer, the “influence of the learners’ knowledge of other languages and cultures on their pragmatic use and development on the use of the L2,” (Kasper, 1992, as cited in Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 78). While some pragmatic knowledge is strictly tied to individual languages and thus can lead to overgeneralizations and pragmatic failure, some pragmatic knowledge is universal (Ochs, 1996), and some can be transferred from learners’ first language (L1) (Kasper, 1997). One of the earliest investigations into the differences in pragmatic awareness between ESL and EFL populations was Takahashi and Beebe’s (1987) qualitative study among Japanese L2 learners of English.

The researchers sought to find evidence of pragmatic transfer (i.e., transfer of L1 sociocultural norms in L2 communication) while investigating the effects of L2 proficiency levels and environments. Two main questions guided this research: 1) Will there be evidence of pragmatic transfer in both learning contexts (EFL and ESL) and at both proficiency levels (low and high)? and 2) Will there be a difference in the amount of transfer according to the different learning environments and proficiency levels? The researchers analyzed the written refusals of Japanese ESL and EFL learners, compared to Japanese and American NSs’ respective refusals. All of the participants completed a discourse completion test (DCT) where participants had to insert a refusal to interlocutors of different statuses in the following categories: requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions. After examining the typical order of formulas for Japanese NSs and American English NSs, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) compared the refusal data of the ESL and EFL participants, finding evidence of pragmatic transfer in both the ESL and EFL contexts, as well as at both proficiency levels. In particular, there was more evidence of pragmatic transfer in the EFL context than in the ESL context, in spite of the EFL learners’ higher average proficiency.

Therefore, the tendency toward pragmatic transfer may be explained by the EFL learners having fewer opportunities for authentic input, causing them to rely more heavily on their L1. Alternatively, as the ESL population was more direct in their refusals and thus more TL-like, this could be explained by their lower proficiency and lack of knowledge of less direct, more complicated expressions. Nonetheless, the EFL learners appeared less pragmatically competent than their ESL peers because they used their more advanced L2 skills to convey L1 expressions and sentiments.

THE ROLE OF PRAGMATIC TRANSFER

One factor in developing pragmatic competence in an L2 is pragmatic transfer, the “influence of the learners’ erudition of other languages and cultures on their pragmatic use and development on the utilization of the L2,” (Kasper, 1992, as cited in Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 78). While some pragmatic cognizance is stringently tied to individual languages and thus can lead to overgeneralizations and pragmatic failure, some pragmatic erudition is macrocosmic (Ochs, 1996), and some can be transferred from learners’ first language (L1) (Kasper, 1997). One of the earliest investigations into the differences in pragmatic vigilance between ESL and EFL populations was Takahashi and Beebe’s (1987) qualitative study among Japanese L2 learners of English.

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Beebe (1987), lower proficiency participants inclined to transfer more often than their higher proficiency peers.

However, results withal designated that incremented time spent in the TL environment caused participants to respond in a more TL-like fashion, thus denoting that the length of exposure in the environment has an effect on transfer.

DISCUSSION

Kasper (1996) describes three conditions to procure pragmatic cognizance: “There must be pertinent input, the input has to be described, and learners need ample opportunity to develop a high caliber of control” (p. 148). The studies above demonstrate that input alone is inadequate for pragmatic competence; learners must notice linguistic forms in their utilization, a factor often more is available in ESL than in EFL contexts.

However, while most studies denote that length of stay in the TL environment has a more preponderant effect on pragmatic competence than proficiency, a deeper analysis of results reveals that individual factors such as pragmatic transfer and learner motivation have a more immensely colossal, more intricate role to play than simple exposure. These results offer several insights into the nature of pragmatics learning and the arduousness of investigating pragmatics development. To commence, the ESL/TL environment is often more salutary than the EFL environment in developing pragmatic competence. This is not indispensable due to more preponderant access to authentic input in an ESL environment but to the intensity of interaction with NSs that causes desecrating (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998; Kinginger, 2008; Schauer, 2006; Shimizu, 2009). The thetemporal factor of an elongated stay in the TL community is an inadequate variable in developing pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Taguchi, 2008). Instead, it engenders more opportunities for relationships with NSs to develop, thus making salient pragmatic aspects of the TL language. However, motivation to learn the L2 and interest in its culture(s) can surmount the encumbrance of the EFL environment in the development of pragmatic competence (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Rafieyan et al., 2013; Takahashi, 2001; Tagashira et al., 2011; Taguchi, 2011), even when opportunities for authentic TL interaction are scarce. Authentic input, consequently, is less paramount in developing pragmatic competence than fostering motivation. Next, the pragmatic transfer can have a negative effect on the development of such competence (Barron, 2003; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Yamagashira, 2001) in the TL environment, especially if issues of learner identity come into conflict with acclimating to NS norms.

Similarly, a transfer of training can have a negative effect on the development of pragmatic competence in any environment, but EFL learners have less of an opportunity to notice classroom overgeneralizations because of their lack of interaction in the TL environment (Shimizu, 2009). In integration, the pragmatic transfer can avail the development of pragmatic competence where the L1 and L2 use kindred strategies (Taguchi, 2008). In particular, the relationship between pragmatic transfer and motivation regardless of

the L2 learning environment seems to subsist (Barron, 2003; Yamagashira, 2001), but more research is needed to account for how much of this positive transfer is intentional, how much is fortuity, and how much relates to learner desire to acclimate to the NS norm, to express an L1 identity in the L2, or to adopt an incipient L2 identity solely for L2 communication.

Lastly, as students do not always make use of potential positive pragmatic transfer (Kasper, 1997), these studies need more detailed interviews or think-aloud protocols to allow the researchers to find out why the participants employed a particular strategy, or if they were even cognizant of their choices. However, Barron (2003) found that the off-line questionnaire meant that learners had more time to think about their answers and were not overloaded by stress or other factors that hinder on-line data collection. It remains unclear what effect the off-line questionnaire itself has on the measurement of pragmatic knowledge, and if the results from an on-line questionnaire would be comparable.

CONCLUSION

While ESL environments generally afford more opportunities for pragmatic development than EFL settings, the dynamic relationships between environment, motivation, and pragmatic transfer all indicate that individual differences have a greater role to play than just exposure in the TL community. Thus, theory, research and, most importantly, language pedagogy must evolve to address the complexity and difficulty of developing and assessing pragmatic competence.

The aspect of motivation requires closer attention as it is keenly tied to sociopragmatics and therefore awareness. Tajeddin and Zand Moghadam (2012) assert that “the first thing EFL learners are motivated to acquire is how to use language appropriately. Their high pragmatic motivation can be a strong impetus for their noticing ability, which can be scaffolded by more pragmatically competent learners or teachers” (p. 367). Furthermore, more studies are needed to investigate the specific relationship between learner motivation (i.e., relationships) and pragmatic acquisition, not just language learning in general.

Specifically, more research that investigates the intersection of pragmatic awareness, cognitive processes of noticing, and motivation is needed (Tagashira et al., 2011) to account for learners’ transition from noticing to comprehending pragmatic infelicities. Retrievable at: Goals and motivation for learning an L2 differ widely among individuals. Some L2learners, particularly in an EFL setting, may learn English for only a special purpose, such as reading trade articles, thus rendering pragmatic knowledge “superfluous” (Barron, 2003, p. 77). Therefore, an important area for future research is the definition of the NS norm and its effect on motivation in ESL and EFL environments. Current research is mostly cross-sectional rather than longitudinal.

More longitudinal studies are needed to measure pragmatic awareness and production prior to arrival and during and after stay in an ESL context (Barron, 2003) and to study the evolution of L2 learners’ attitudes toward the NS norm. As pragmatic competence “containing cultural aspects and features of social context and conventions cannot be

conceptualized without a target language and culture in mind” (Timpe, 2012, p. 171), future research should also make explicit how the TL features to be measured are tied to the TL culture at hand and what effect deviations from the pragmatic norm have on overall communicative competence, as well as their relationship to both pragmatic transfer and motivation. In addition, more attention should be given to the role of pragmatic transfer in both ESL and EFL contexts to determine how it is related to awareness and the pedagogical implications of helping students become aware of universal transfer.

This is of particular importance in an EFL context where students may also draw on preconceived cultural stereotypes (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010), which can be further reinforced by lack of authentic interaction in the TL with NSs (Barron, 2003). Rafieyan et al. (2013) have shown that the problem of negative transfer can be mitigated when learners are familiarized with and motivated to learn about the L2 culture. Research on the distance between L1 and L2 cultures may have a greater effect on NN familiarity with TL pragmatic norms (Kecskes, 2003) and inform classroom approaches to making input salient. Lastly, research (e.g., Ishihara & Cohen, 2010) indicates that ESL learners improve as a direct result of pragmatic instruction within the classroom environment. It is then imperative that EFL teachers also incorporate a pragmatic element to their instruction, particularly if student motivation is not high. However, while many TESOL teacher-training courses stress a theoretical knowledge of pragmatics, few provide practical techniques for teachers to integrate into their respective classrooms (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009).

Therefore, if pragmatic knowledge is indeed essential for any language teacher, TESOL teacher-training courses should mandate coursework pragmatics and its instruction not to provide “learners with new information but to make them aware of what they know already and encourage them to use their universal or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge in L2 contexts” (Kasper, 1997, p. 4). A demonstrated proficiency in this area should be a requirement for a certificate or diploma for any future EFL or ESL teacher.

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