

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN THE ACQUISITION OF SECOND LANGUAGE: A NON-NATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Acquisition of second language (L2) learners especially non-native learners face several affective barriers. Affective barriers popularly known as psychological barriers pose a great obstacle potentially in the acquisition of second language. Anxiety, lack of confidence and limitation of adjustment to the changed environment make second language learners unnerving and ambivalent. Non-native learners feel shaky, overlapping and ambiguous in the perception and the production of second language. Likewise, teachers' disinterest to promote learners rather positively enhances the scope of psychological crisis. Practically, learners do have a potential weakness on linguistic knowledge like four skills of English language and understanding the needs of students. The focus of this paper will be upon the identification of valid factors which in human psychology create obstruction to achieve mastery over language. In addition, realistic presentation of non-native learning context, affective conflict and constraints of motivation often lead to maximizing psychological barriers. In fact this paper will specifically deal with cross cultural viewpoints-native or non-native with analytic discussion.

**Keywords:** Acquisition, Barriers, Cultural, Motivation, Psychological

### **INTRODUCTION**

Second language (L2) learners are confounded by the application of English language for day to day communicative and professional purposes. When they feel necessary to use this language, they encounter a number of problems which in fact come from psychology. Brain does not function properly which in turn creates obstruction of natural function of language. In the acquisition of second language, L2 learners face a number of external and internal forces which impede the conversation, communication and delivery of language. In this stage, it is relevant to know what language acquisition means. "Acquisition' occurs subconsciously as a result of participating in natural communication where the focus is on meaning.....". ".....'acquired knowledge' is located in the left hemisphere of the brain (in most users) in the language areas; it is available for automatic processing" (Ellis 1985).

Since it is a second language, L2 learners address psychological barriers which are ostentatious, though all of them are not widely accepted in every region of the world, to pose a great difficulty for the smooth usability of second language.

"...second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language" (Schumann, 1978c:34).

Psychological impediments referring to inner complexity to express words in the foreign language context are most dominant causes in the way of second language acquisition. In addition, some affective factors like anxiety or social biasness, self-belief, motivation (low intrinsic and extrinsic forces, attitudinal patterns to language learning and social disposition

are visible barriers to claim mastery over second language. It is universally acknowledged that reception is the prior condition for production which broadly details that listening is the first case to speaking words. If learners perceive language including pronunciation, sound patterns and sound units, they can easily comprehend second language spoken in non-native context.

It is cited by Nizkdubov, Zyubanov and Johnson (2015, P. 212) "The process of speech comprehension is easier in those situations where the interlocutor has the ability to visually observe partner's speech organs in the communication process, i.e. to monitor lips, articulation, as well as facial expressions. Visual perception is often considered to be an important criterion for understanding words and sentences by ear" (Galskova & Gez, 2004).

Along with this discussion, L2 learners face peer pressure to acquire second language as non-native learners sometimes need to speak to native learners. Pronunciation and presentation of speaking are two strong markers where non-native people feel shaky and hesitating to show confidence and easiness over language. In the case of affective factors, it can be observed that where there is high anxiety and low motivation, language learning does not occur confidently. On the other hand, where there is high motivation and low anxiety, language learning occurs confidently.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN SLA: A PRAGMATIC DISCUSSION**

Learners of SLA go through various crucial stages of psychological barriers which in some cases frustrate the progress of L2. A pragmatic discussion will be made delineating some psychological aspects in the process of language learning:

### *Emotion*

Emotion is a way of motivation which creates inner temptation to have mastery over L2. Emotions are implicated in almost everything people do, functioning to both facilitate motivation as well as provide a "read out" of a person's ongoing activities (Reeve, 2015). Emotion is an abstract term that represents several complex and multifaceted processes. A single emotion, such as fear or surprise, can be conceptualized as an emergent, integrated whole encompassing several coordinated processes, including subjective feelings, biological responses, and social phenomena (Izard, 1993).

The most commonly studied emotion in second language learning is anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Anxiety arousal is associated with cognitive disruptions and distractions often associated with self-focused thinking (Eysenck, 1979; Norton & Abbott, 2016), subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry (Scatterfield & Feldman, 2014; Leigh, 2015), along with physical reactions such as increasing heart rate, sweaty hands and body, blood flow to large muscles and "butterflies" in the stomach (Spielberger & Reheiser, 2009).

### *Motivation*

Most researchers and educators would agree that motivation "is a very important, if not the most important factor in language learning", without which even 'gifted' individuals cannot accomplish long-term goals, whatever the curricula and whoever the teacher. In terms of the definition of motivation, recent educational theory has tended toward the interpretation of Gardner (1985) defining motivation to learn an L2 as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction

experienced in this activity". So the motivation of SLA refers to the desire and impetus of the acquirers.

Gardner and Krashen point out that there are two motivations, integrative one and instrumental one. With the former motivation, the L2 acquirers are interested in the target language and willing to participate in that social life. But with the latter motivation, the L2 acquirers only want to pass some examination, go overseas to study, travel or be promoted. We can easily see that these two motivations are positive and negative to the SLA respectively.

### ***Enjoyment***

Human beings are naturally in the need of experiencing pleasure when they feel it for biological function or social conditioning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Enjoyment is regarded as emotion which is felt when an individual not only meets their needs but also supersedes them to execute something which is unexpected or surprising (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

Enjoyment is not a restricted word. Rather it focuses on the multiple facets of life especially in the acquisition of second language. Forms of entertainment include presenting comic stories, telling jokes, singing songs and sharing funny family stories at ELT classroom. Students feel positively impressionistic when they are motivated with entertainment. Enjoyment includes 'intellectual focus, heightened attention, and optimal challenge' (Boudreau, MacIntyre and Dewaele, 2018).

### ***Anxiety***

Anxiety works as a factor in the progress or recession of second language acquisition. It leads to the reinforcement-it might be positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement to the learners of non-native English speaking countries. Fear and anxiety are considered as highly detrimental to the process of learning (MacIntyre, 2017). Actually anxiety is illustrated as a potential predictor of success or failure for the students of second language (MacIntyre, 1999). It can be cited in Boudreau, MacIntyre and Dewaele (2018) by Young (1991), "Some examples of this include teaching students to recognize irrational fears or anxieties, role playing activities, group discussion, and active monitoring of feelings of anxiety during classroom sessions". Anxiety is deeply rooted in fear which arouses negative human emotions. Anxiety emerging from fear breaks down fundamental progress of language development.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this section of the paper, a number of relevant literature will be reviewed in order to seek for the sustenance of research on psychological barriers in the acquisition of second language. "Psychological distance is the result of various affective factors which concern the learner as an individual.....The psychological factors come into play in cases where the social distance is indeterminant.....The psychological factors are affective in nature. They include (1) language shock (i.e. the learner experiences doubt and possible confusion when using the L2); (2) cultural shock (i.e.) the learner experiences disorientation, stress, fear, etc. as a result of differences between his or her own culture and that of the target language community; (3) motivation; and ego boundaries."

In psychology, learners are considered individually. Psychological factors are affective and work upon the abstract notions of human life. Language shock refers to possible doubts and confusions when they use second language. Cultural shock refers to a gap between native culture and foreign culture. Similarly, motivation concentrates upon positive promotion of human psychology and ego boundary focuses on the possible psychological conflict occurring in the way of human communication.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) investigated a number of social and psychological factors known as attitudes and motivation which are illustrated as follows:

- i. attitudes towards the community and people who speak the L2 (i.e. ‘group specific attitudes);
- ii. attitudes towards learning the language concerned; and
- iii. attitudes towards languages and language learning in general

From the literature mentioned above, it can be understood that ‘attitude’ works as communicative bridge between community and people speaking L2. In addition, ‘attitude’ as one of the psychological factors deals with language and language learning.

On the other hand, Cattell (1970), for instance, attempts to measure personality using a series of dichotomies, seen as poles on continua, such as cool/warm, shy/venturesome, not assertive/dominant.

Similarly Eysenck (1964) identifies two general traits, again represented as dichotomies-extrovert/introvert and neurotic/stable.

Ellis (1985) referred to, “One of the intuitively appealing hypotheses that has been investigated is that extroverted learners learn more rapidly and are more successful than introverted learners. It has been found that extroverted learners will find it easier to make contact with other users of the L2 and therefore will obtain more input”.

Ellis (1985) in favor the extroversion and introversion supported that learners possessing the features of extroversion are successful learners because extroverted learners have more frequency and acquaintance with people of different communities and regions. Extroversion subsequently leads to more inputs.

Ellis (1985) commented, “The other major aspect of personality that has been studied with regard to SLA is inhibition. It is hypothesized that the defensiveness associated with inhibition discourages the risk-taking which is necessary for rapid progress in a L2”.

It can be said that learners with the quality of inhibition feel dissociated from society and they thus cannot make positive progress to have proficiency over second language.

Guiora et al. (1972a; 1972b) concluded that inhibition had a negative effect on L2 pronunciation. Such experiments, while interesting, are not convincing. Alcohol-reduced inhibition in an experimental setting is far removed the realities of most classroom or naturalistic learners.

In an important article which applies this research to exploring how learners engage in tasks in the language classroom, Philp and Duchesne (2016) distinguish four strands of engagement which affect L2 learning cited by Littlewood (2004):

- i. cognitive engagement, e.g. sustained attention, mental effort, self-regulation;
- ii. behavioural engagement, e.g. time on task, participation;
- iii. emotional engagement, e.g. motivated involvement;
- iv. social engagement, e.g. when learners listen and provide feedback to one another.

It is cited in Castaneda (2017), “Anxiety has become one of the most important variables in adult L2 learning, with students facing an elevated pressure to acquiring a second

language at the same pace or rhythm as their younger counterparts. Very frequently the outcome is not as positive as adults would expect, which leads to stress and a very high pressure in class”.

Anxiety irrespective of adult and young is a key variable which makes a pressurized nervous system in the style and pattern of communication. Often anxiety leads to stress and thus obstructs the ways of language functioning.

A recent study shows that Gkonou, Daubney & Dewaele (2017) argue that language anxiety works as a complex and dynamic construct. In fact, it is closely related to other psychological variables which include the self and personality.

Moreover, Castaneda (2017) reported, “One of the main limitations of adults attempting to work with new methodologies is related to fossilization in morphosyntax and pronunciation, as stated in Singleton (2001), Birdsong (2006) and Krashen (2009) because adult learners tend to systematize errors and repeat them. This limitation leads to fear of ridicule when speaking in public and a sharp decrease in confidence and self-esteem, which affects the possible satisfactory outcome of any communicative learning strategy”.

## **EFL CLASSROOM SCENARIO AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS**

EFL students are somewhat reserved and taciturn in the use of second language inside classroom. They think about ‘what would happen about my language and pronunciation if my peers listen and go with back criticism’-which demotivates them to use second language fluently and effectively. Turula (2005) considers this kind language situation as ‘situational anxiety’ to many EFL learners. Young (1991) told that (cited in Arganman and Abu Rabia, 2002, p. 145) ‘processes, atmosphere and events’ in class are the sources of language anxiety where students fall back in the method of effective communication. Young (1991) identifies a number of provoking factors including personality component, learners and teachers’ beliefs about language learning, teachers-students’ interaction and tests in the second language.

Teacher is the key authority in the EFL classroom. Teacher should use implicit error-correction set by Turula (2005). The purpose of implicit error-correction is that teacher corrects students’ mistakes implicitly to motivate students for self-correction by them. It will increase the self-confidence inside them and they can have the belief to correct their mistakes by them.

It is cited in Mahmud and Suryana (2015), “The proper classroom layout may allow the students to help each other. This mutual assistance may have a double effect. The first effect is increasing students’ cognitive skills because the anxious learners may get some help from non-anxious ones to prepare before class. The second strategy is alleviating anxiety. By knowing that the other students are ready to help them whenever they need, anxious students may feel that they are not being isolated in the classroom. This covers the positive thinking strategy because this may let them know that non-anxious learners are also their friends, and there no need to consider them as a threat”.

Koba et. al. referred to the Community Language Learning (CLL) where he preferred to support the seat arrangement in the case of language anxiety. Students sit face to face and they will build up class community. Joan (1993) such face to face interaction may promote co-operative learning and students can solve their problem.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPLICATION

Non-native learners possess a sum of psychological backwardness about the acquisition of second language. As second language comprises of four skills like reading, listening, writing and speaking, they feel a sort of strangeness and awkwardness in having mastery over second language equally. Non-native students have a fear of communication apprehension. It is cited in Xiaoyan Du (2009) that non-native students have "individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons".

In fact general psychological complication includes 'quietness, shyness, and reticence' Xiaoyan Du (2009). It is cited in Tinjacá and Contreras (2008), "Jones (2004) defines this phenomenon in language learning situation as a fear provoked when the learner is asked to speak in the second or the foreign language in public, with the risk of social embarrassment". In addition, "Our learners often need to be able to speak with confidence in order to carry out many of their most basic transactions. It is the skill by which they are most frequently judged, and through which they make or lose friends. It is the vehicle... of social ranking, professional advances and of business" (Bygate, 1987, p. 1).

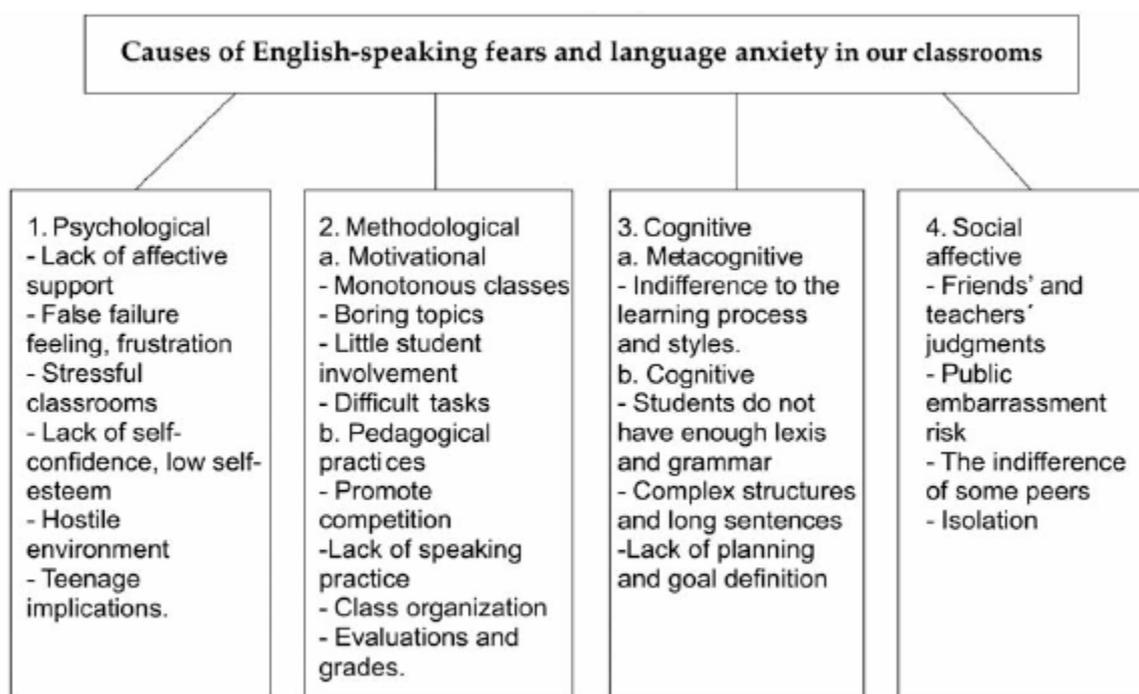


Diagram 1. Causes of English-speaking fears and language anxiety in our classrooms.

## CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF THE DIAGRAM

Learners face four patterns of anxiety when they use second language for classroom performance which are Psychological, Methodological, Cognitive and Social. Firstly, psychological anxiety includes lack of emotional support, failure, stress, frustration, lack of self-confidence, hostile environment and teenage complications. Anxieties mentioned here expose the psychological complexity. Secondly, methodological complexity includes lack of motivation like monotonous classes, dull topics, lack of students' participation. Similarly

pedagogical practices include the practice of competition, lack of speaking and evaluations and grades. Cognitive phase refers to the metacognitive which focuses on learners' indifference to learning process and style. In the same cognitive phase deals with insufficiency students' lexis and grammar, long patterned sentences and complex structures and indefinite planning and scattered goal. Finally social affective factors concentrate upon the judgment of friends and teachers, possibility of risk of embarrassment and feeling of isolation.

In comparison with native speakers, non-native speakers suffer from inner complexity and inner unnerving. They are in lack of psychological freedom and feel inner impediments in the use of language.

“Self-esteem and self-confidence are like the foundations of a building: if they are not secure enough, even the best technology will be insufficient to build solid walls over them. The teacher can employ the most creative motivational ideas, but if students have basic doubts about themselves they will be unable to ‘bloom’ as learners” (Dörnyei, 2002, p. 87).

“Moreover, people with a low sense of self-efficacy do not perceive difficult tasks as challenges but as threats, and in this situation they become more concentrated on their personal deficiencies and obstacles rather than on how to perform the tasks successfully. Consequently, this kind of people can likely give up on whatever activity because they lose faith in their capabilities and a shadow is always behind them, presenting them from getting past the insecurity and fear” Tinjacá and Contreras (2008).

In this section of this paper, some remedies are given out to overcome psychological backwardness for the non-native learners. It can said such: “avoid social comparison, even in its subtle forms, promote cooperation instead of competition, help learners to accept the fact that they will make mistakes as part of the learning process and make tests and assessment completely transparent and involve students in the negotiation of the final mark” (Dörnyei 2002, p. 92-94).

## **CONCLUSION**

Psychological barriers are a set of dynamics which function from teachers' aspects, students' aspects and sometimes management of institution. A non-native context is a good floor to present crises and probable dilemmas in the use of second language. Learners have language anxiety, environment uneasiness and application complexity which generally obstruct natural flow of the second language acquisition. It is relevant to mention that teachers should not only concentrate upon effective strategies of teaching but they should also positively value some psychological aspects like behavior, emotion, feeling and attitude of learners. It is the responsibility of teachers to retain some factors like psychological fear and external factors which in fact greatly affect learning process. Students will feel comfortable and positive to use target language along with other peers inside the classroom. Teachers should help students to overcome psychological barriers in order that they might be capable to achieve significant background and form necessary language skills for ensuring a good performance in teaching, learning and management of any profession. Relevantly Krashen's affective filter hypothesis plays a significant role in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Non-native students need an environment where they can make positive feedback upon the progress of second language; they can make self-correction by following active learning affective factors. Proportionate distribution of desire, motivation and positivity can make non-native students to achieve and understand second language effectively.

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