Second Language Oral Fluency and Self-willing Motivation

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Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to try to convey some of language recognition and understanding problem as it viewed from psychological perspective. To do this I will describe in detail some of the experimental research in this domain, illustrating some kinds of theoretical problems that involve in second language oral fluency. In order to answer the researching question, this paper aims at a description of second language oral fluency development from self-willing motivation based on Levelt's speaking model, Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought and de Bot's second language model, according to logical theory that thing's changing lies in their intrinsic motivation, having discussed the relationship between self-willing motivation and some relevant factors, finally, we draw a conclusion that self-willing motivation is an original motivation both in second language oral fluency and its learning.

Key Words: SL, oral fluency, self-willing motivation

I. Introduction

Nowadays many business companies take the ability of spoken English as one of the items when they employ a talented college undergraduates. In comparison, they are content to hire those who have more foreign language comprehensive and oral abilities.

However, an investigation, made by the Nation College Foreign Language Direction Council in 2001, says that some business companies are unsatisfied with newly college undergraduates, unsatisfied with their English comprehensive competence, especially their spoken English. They complained that most undergraduates lack of oral fluency. The investigation displays that those who have strong abilities in English oral fluency capability merely act as 5% of all, with bad either exceedingly bad act as 37%, those who are fit for the employments, the business negotiation with the foreigners only act as 14% (Dai 2001). Thus developing students’ SL oral fluency and language competence has been considered as the ultimate goal of SL learning.

Early in the 1950s, some world famous linguists have been studying on fluent quality of SL oral producing. Among them the most comprehensive one is Levelt’s speaking model. In 1983, Anderson issued Adaptive Control of Thought. He applied the theory to studying on the explanation for development of second language oral producing. And de Bot brought ACT model into Levelt’s oral producing model to discuss the quality of SL oral fluency.

In China, SL acquisition researches have been discussed more. But few of us has theoretically studied on its fluency, except recently Professor Wu (1999), according to Levelt’s speaking model has described the language producing fluently according to its process from function to form in his non-linguistic development of oral ability in the foreign language classroom setting. Mr. Zhang (1999) following this theory has discussed speaking function. But their research ceased at its product research.

II. Second Language Oral Producing Fluency

1. The Definition of Oral Fluency

Native tongue fluency

Leeson (1975) gave the definition to native language oral fluency, who claimed that oral fluency refers to the ability of the speaker who produces indefinitely many sentences conforming to the phonological, syntactical and semantic exigencies of a given natural language on the basis of a finite exposure to a finite corpus of that language. Fillmore (1979) discussed fluency according to the language producing and differed the four different functions in native language using. The first is the ability to fill time with talk, that is, there is no prolong stop when language putout, requiring that communication goes without long time pauses, the quantity of discourse is more important than its quality. The speaker’s brain with this kind of ability can out come language unconsciously automatically without any monitoring. It is more like Lennon’s (1990) point view of automatic procedural skill. This means the language processing skill is obtained only by using it, not by learning it. The second is the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned, and “semantically dense” sentences. This ability reveals the speakers’ language knowledge of grasping syntactical and semantic exigencies. Fillmore proved the truth of this ability by setting example of
Chomsky’s (1959) linguistic competence. The third is the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts. That is, speaker with kind of ability can avoid being nervous, when not knowing how to express his thoughts or in some unexpected situations. The fourth is the ability to be creative and imaginative in language use. Thus it is concluded that the difference showed in language using is the difference in one’s oral fluency.

General to say, Leeson’s fluency conception is equal to Chomsky’s linguistic competence so called a generative language concept. Leeson regarded the evaluation or foreign language expressing as a basic standard. His definition implies “creativity” and “correctness”. In Chomsky’s linguistic competence, he put out ‘innateness hypothesis’, that children learn their native language very quickly and with little effort.

Second language oral fluency

People can easily make their mother tongue fluent. But linguists have not come to an agreement about second language fluency. Faerch et al (1984) thought that fluency is a relative concept. In SL learning it often refers to express their thoughts easily automatically. Brumfit (1984) said that fluency is “the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the students”. He insists on fluency can both be applied to language output and language receiving. Sajavaara (1981) suggested that according to communicative acceptability to definite second language oral fluency, fluency is communicative acceptability of language behavior. At this aspect, they emphasize communicative environment.

In fact, Brumfit’s explanation is based on language producing and hearing, which enables us to study on SL fluency in a wide range. Sajavaara emphasizes the communicative acceptability and time traits. He also drew our attention to realize that fluency is associated not only with speakers but also listeners. As a matter of fact, it partly reflects Fillmore’s fluency competence. Fillmore stressed when we talk about language fluency we should think of ‘facility felt by the listener; validity; flexibility and creativity’ felt by the listener. Brumfit gave the definition to oral fluency by comparing fluency to accuracy. Now we can conclude that second language fluency is operationally defined as the ability to speak an acceptable variety of SL with smooth, continuity and coherence that can be felt by the listener.

2. Theories of Oral Producing Models

Levelt’s speaking model

Levelt’s speaking model, an oral producing model, theoretically explains the whole process of discourse
producing from intake till output (see figure 1). His speaking model is composed of several parts of knowledge formulations, in which there exists declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. Firstly learner should gather some language massages such as scene knowledge, encyclopedic knowledge to form declarative knowledge for future use. Levelt’s speaking model shows that because of speakers’ self-willingness intake, a lot of declarative knowledge will be organized to form the conceptual mechanism. The function of conceptual mechanism is busying selecting the expression concerned with the declarative knowledge. And formulator mechanism, by a certain encoding process, organizes the massage into pre-verbal. Pre-verbal massage working as a content of assignment topic is put into formulator mechanism, whose function is to convert pre-verbal massage into phonetic plan by correctly selecting lemma, lexeme, as well as using grammar phoneme lemma and morphology stored in a corpus. Once lemmas are selected, some concerned syntactic massages are immediately pick out. Grammar encoding forms the surface structure of discourse. Simultaneously going with the surface structure of discourse is the phoneme encoding. Formulator mechanism converts the surface structure of discourse and phoneme encoding into phonetic plan and then send it into sound-production mechanism and finally the producing discourse can be heard by the listeners. In fact as language comes out so fast that the whole process happens without any delay if speaker desires to do.

The central to the framework is the concept that oral ability development consists of three stages. In the first stage, knowledge about the target language is gained. In second stage, the ‘declarative knowledge’ is applied to oral use. The result of oral practice is a ‘procedural knowledge’, the development of which will not only gradually allow the learners to speak much faster, more unattended, automatic and also simultaneously access to their ‘declarative knowledge’ about the target language during oral communication. In the third stage, the ‘procedural knowledge’ undergoes a “restructuring”. According to Levelt, the more practical declarative knowledge is, the more fluently the procedural knowledge produces.

As adapted by de Bot (1992), Levelt’s speaking model is applied in the explanation for SL oral fluency. de Bot basically keeps the model original, only does a bit adjustment in order to construct a theoretical framework to explain the SL development. He stressed that bilingual person has two formulator mechanisms in second language producing. But two kinds of vocabularies (native vs foreign) stored in one corpus. Furthermore, the process of SL producing is more complex than native one. This complexity shows that when we want to make our SL producing fluently, we should not only have enough declarative knowledge but also have sufficient bilingual practical knowledge. He stressed that bilingual speakers generally lack of self-willing motivation to intake the declarative knowledge and reluctant to work on it. This leads to the process of oral producing non-fluently.

III. Hinder Factors of Second Language Oral Fluency

1 Psychological Factors
   · Vital psychological phenomenon: anxiety

   The process of language producing is learner’s mental process. The most important psychological phenomenon in learning second language is learner’s anxiety. A clinical observations reported by Horwitz (1986) said that anxiety is most often focused on speaking, with difficulty in speaking in class being the most common complaint of anxious students.

   Horwitz argues for the existence of an anxiety specific to SL, learning conceptually related to three other specific varieties. There are communication apprehension of shyness that interferes with talking to other people, test anxiety, and a generalized fear of negative evaluation. So most vital one is the communication anxiety. It is also largely influenced by the threat to a learner’s self-concept in being forced to communicate with less proficiency in the second language than he or she has in the native one.

2 Language Environment Factors
   · Social environment

   Language environment refers to time, occasion, site or objects of speaking. Environmental differences may be associated with some variation in the rate of acquisition of oral producing. Generally, a person acquires his native language easily in a long-stable environment. Even those with very limited cognitive ability develop quite complex language systems if they are brought up in the environments in which people talk to them and engage them in communication. We are lack of this kind of language environment.

   · Classroom environment

   Now most China-students acquire their SL only in classroom environment. College English teachers use traditional teaching methods in their classes. Still dominated knowledge is taught through the teacher who sometimes gives the explanation in Chinese. The teacher is in complete charge of class activities while learners are passive knowledge receivers. Such classroom environment severely frustrates learners’ initiate self-willing motivation and restraints the development of their potentials and creativities. As a result their oral competence fails in developing.
A well-known Canadian scholar Da Shang (2001), when interviewed, as a successful foreign language learner, said: “I think the main difficulty is trying to find opportunities to use your English, trying to find foreign friends and someone you can speak English with. Because I think the big problem with learning any foreign language in China is the lack of an environment to be able to use it.” Just as Professor Hu Zhianglin said, in the Fourth International Conference on ELT in China, “Dialogue is better than monologue.”

3. Linguistic Plan and Type of Task Factors

Linguistic plan and type of target language teaching can affect students’ oral producing fluency if managed unreasonably. Leeson (1975) analysis language producing encoding process that it does its work at three layers; tactics layer, generative layer and integrate layer. Natural language producing bases on these three layers. Hinder emerging at any layer should affect learners’ oral producing fluency. N. Ellis (1996) states: “Although intention to learn is not always crucial to learning, attention to the material to be learned is”. Schmidt also agrees “there is no learning of unattended stimulus features of natural languages.” The producing of language using comprises a continuum of discourse types ranged from entirely unplanned to entirely well planned. Unplanned discourse is discourse that lacks forethought and preparation. It is associated with spontaneous communication, e.g. everyday conversation or brainstorming in writing. Planned discourse is discourse that is thought out prior to expression. It requires conscious thought and the opportunity to work out content and expression.

If linguistic plan is superior to the learner’s acceptance or over complex, beyond the learner’s comprehensive ability, learner’s internal processing mechanisms will take time and effort to retrieve that causes some unexpected stop. If teacher arranges his target language plan, or type of tasks reasonable and suitable to the learners’ language learning levels, the knowledge can be retrieved easily quickly automatically and produced fluently. So for oral producing fluency, one of the distinctive accesses that the learner has is to set up feasible linguistic plan and suitable type of task. Especially, nowadays college enrollment expansion has also caused new problems.

IV. Function of Self-willing Motivation on SLOF

1. Definition of Motivation

Motivation belongs to the ethics category, refers to individual’s desire and thoughts. It is a common-sense view that people’s action is governed by certain needs and interests. However, these can’t be directly observed. They have to be inferred from what learners actually do. Not surprisingly, therefore, the study of motivation in SL learning that always comes with the study of attitudes, interest, desire, knowledge etc, has involved the development of concepts specific to SL learning and its oral producing.

Psycholinguists and application language educational circles have confirmed that the SL learning motivation chiefly divided into the following three types. First is global motivation, which consists of a general orientation to the goal of learning SL. The second is situational motivation, which varies according to the situation in which learning takes place. The third is task motivation, which is the motivation for performing particular learning tasks. And some psycholinguists have pointed out some other kinds, such as integrative motivation, which refers to language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment and instrumental motivation for language learning for more immediate or practical goals. Research has shown that these types of motivations are related to success in SL learning. All these may be included in extrinsic motivation that is not mutually exclusive. SL oral fluency acquisition rarely involves just this type or that.

But according to logical theory that thing’s changing lies in its intrinsic motivation. Taking a different approach to SL oral fluency, I’d like to point out a different opinion. As language expression fluency demands the conversion from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge, to complete this process, students should do a lot of practical work, all of which must be in great need of one’s self-willing power. So the most influential item on SL oral producing fluency is self-willing motivation that is to be thought of an original motivation in both SL oral fluency and acquisition.

2. Self-willing Motivation Thought

To answer the question why we say self-willing motivation is an original motive power in various extrinsic or intrinsic motivations. I’d like to demonstrate the relationship between self-willing motivation and some factors concerned.

2.1. Self-willing Motivation and Interest

Rod Ellis (1985) mentioned that the most intrinsic motivation for learning is the learner’s spontaneous
interest. In order to identify the effects on SL oral fluency and how to improve students’ SL acquisition, we have made some questionnaires on how to improve students’ oral fluency and English communicative ability. The questionnaires were made in Chinese. The question papers were distributed among advanced, medium, and lower level students in the first year class in Grade00 and Grade01, over two hundred students in different major, different colleges. They were asked to make out in some factors which one affects their oral speech most: Each case rate as figure 2 shows. Clearly the greatest effect is interest. Its direct effect is about 49 percent, indirect effect is about 13, total effect is 62 which just as we have expected. It illustrates the learners who are more interested in foreign language have spent much more time or energy to expose to western culture, custom and tradition from all sorts of sources. For once a learner is sure of willing to do something, he will show his interest in it and he won’t yield to the pressure coming from outside.

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(Figure 2  Questionnaire of motivation factors on oral fluency )

A self-willing motivation caused from interest will motive learner to achieve his learning. Da Shan said “I study Chinese just for interest really …It’s so much easier to learn something if you enjoy it.” As a matter of psychology, interest or self-willingness is the personality psychological feature. It is the individual’s special tendency towards the discourse. One’s self-willingness, the most intrinsic one, can stir up his self-willing motivation towards his action. One’s self-wing motivation also can stimulate his interest in SL oral producing fluency. See, interest comes from self-willing motivation, conversely serves it.

2.2. Self-willing Motivation and Attention

To achieve oral process without any delay, learner should assemble his attention on cognitive mechanism to do much more practice. The whole oral producing does not work without attention and practice. Just as N. Ellis (1996) pointed out, “Although intention to learn is not always crucial to learning, attention to the material to be learned is’. The students who have strong self-willing motivation can lock their attention on target language learning for a long time and do it with higher accurate. On the contrary, the student are lack of self-willing motivation, his attention is easily separated by any matter from outside. Student’ self-willing motivation involves in a lot of practice. Practice locking on a certain target language obtains more restructures and more qualified procedures. They speed up the processing in both formulator mechanisms and vocal-mechanisms finally promoting oral fluency. Figure 3 (Yan 2001) can give a reasonable description.

2.3 Self-willing Motivation and Self-efficacy, Study Value

Self-efficacy is that students’ degree of anticipating deriving much high level in SL learning, which is the significant component part of self-confident mind. This factor also works on the relevance of SL oral fluency. The student who sets very high demands on his control of target language will similarly expect to achieve a high level of control of the language producing fluency. Perhaps learner has done a lot in practicing, for some reason but fail in obtaining an ideal oral speaking. He finds his self-efficacy low, so he says to himself. “I’m not the guy to do it well”. This will often prevent him from trying to keep on practicing. If he is about to have desire to learn well but lack of self-efficacy, it is likely to cause him a great deal of frustration in oral producing. At moment, his self-willing motivation can encourage him to be more confident to help release from feeling uncertain, unable at practicing. He will set a high self-efficacy and full of energetic to do it well.

Study value refers to the result of learning ratio after a period time of study, the student who spends more
time in learning and oral practicing fails to get ideal score. They lose study value as well as confidence. It is hard to gain a high study value in the situation of classroom learning. We should find out the vital factor to solve the problem, attribute students’ success to face their study value reasonably rather than effort, helping students set realistic goals. When a student has a strong self-willing motivation, he will have an positive attitude and self-confidence which should be added to his study value. Once a learner thinks of it able to communicate in fluent skillful SL without a burden, he is willing to experience it actively, his study value will be high.

2.4 Self-willing Motivation and Anxiety

It is inevitable that there appears anxiety in learner’s SL acquisition, a small but important group of undergraduates who are embarrassed to speak in class, who are afraid of being laughed. The correlation between self-willing motivation and learning anxiety seems likely to be interacted. To response to the question about students’ anxiety, Bailey’s (1983) analyses competitiveness in different language learners, he proposes a model of how learner’s self-image in comparisons with other learners can either impair or enhance SL acquisition. Where the comparison results in an unsuccessful learner, there may be debilitating or facilitating anxiety. But conversely to say with strong learning anxiety, a learner’s self-willing motivation can be influenced a little by both debilitating anxiety in the case of which, students may reduce or abandon learning effort also influenced by facilitating anxiety in the case of which students increase their efforts in order to compare more favorable with other students. As a result, their learning is enhanced when they find they are behind the others, they should be anxious.

In classroom practice, teachers can understand why some students, given the same opportunity to speaking, may be successful while some others are not. It also appeals intuitively to those who have tried unsuccessfully to make their oral fluency in conditions where they feel stressed or uncomfortable. It is no doubt that success in developing oral fluency may be in itself contribute to more positive self-willing motivation.

2.5. Self-willing Motivation and Former Score

In the questionnaire, the second important factor that affects the students’ oral fluency is their former scores. They pay more attention to their former scores. Majority of students thought that their former scores are even not high enough to pass the present session examination therefore, how to do well in oral practice. So they lose their interest in oral speaking, have no desire to practice it.

An investigation shows us whether students’ former scores influence their SL acquisition or not. The students in class B00-1 the entrance examination passing percentage over 90 score of average entrance examination score is 25%. In the year of 2002 their Band-4 Examination passing percentage is 68%, most of them in the class could read or speak fluently. But compared with it, the students in B00-3 class, their total percentage of entrance examination is 34.2%, but their Band-4 examination passing percentage only 24%. Most of them read non-fluently, even hardly open their mouths in class. They were in the same major, taught by the same teacher, having covered the same time. Why? The former’ self-willing motivation as a whole is higher than the latter. This shows us that the former score can’t interfere students’ learning and achieving much though sometimes it may determine whether a learner can do well or not.

That’s to say learner’s former score affects his language learning and its oral fluency little, only if teachers pay more attention to cultivate students’ self-willing motivation in time, their communicative ability can be improved.

2.6. Self-willing motivation and goal-orientation

Setting goal-orientation can lead students’ attention orientation and effort orientation to a certain target. It impels students to insist in exploring correlation linguistic plan and type of task on the basis of their difficulties. Students with powerful self-willing motivation trend to a little high goal-orientation and have strong confidence to achieve this goal by their willing efforts. In fact, either to reach future goal or present one, in order to attain the predictive goals, students need drive their own self-willing motivation to support them to approach the goals.
Generally, students who fix a specified future goal are good at English learning and speaking. The present goal does not constitute challenge to them, but the future goal proposes far more challenge to them. At this moment the students’ self-willing motivation are very powerful. They are full of strong willingness to arrive at the goal. They can do better at SL oral fluency. However, so far as we know that for the undergraduates in most of universities, their learning purposes aimed at present. Once they achieve these goals, they are free from practicing anything about SL. This is one of the reasons why the undergraduates’ foreign language oral fluent quality is difficult to raise.

3. Oral Fluency Determined by Self-willing Motivation

It should be noted from the discussions above that self-willing motivation has a complex nature since the sources of motivating factors are non-separate from, and a result of the interaction of, besides psychological, social and environmental factors. There is bound to be a strong correlation between self-willing motivation and SL oral fluency by virtue of the fact that without self-willing motivation, language learning or language oral producing fluency does not take place. In order to show the relationship between self-willing motivation and oral producing fluency, figure 4 may be a slight reference. There can be little doubt that self-willing motivation is a powerful factor in SL oral fluency. In other words, it is the motivation that is engendered by the learning process itself that seems to matter most. A rather similar view is taken by Mac Naiman (1978) He argues that the really important part of motivation lies in the act of communication itself, rather than in any general orientation. It is the need to get meaning across and the pleasure experienced when this is achieved that motivates SL oral fluency. To see this, we might drive distinguishing self-willing motivation home, which is the key to all other motivation factors. The importance of this reason for the student to determine what degree of effort he will make and what cost he will pay for practicing in learning.

The implication here, it should be stressed, is that if we are going to be able to understand these relationships, then we need to know a great deal more about the study on the intrinsic reasons; self-willing motivation. We should know self-willing motivation which is complement each other with interests governs the other factors such as personality, anxiety, self-efficacy, attention, study value etc. is to be the original motivation in oral producing fluency.

V. Conclusion

The dissertation has presented a view of human speech understanding as an interactive and apparently highly efficient process, that attempts to analyze SL oral producing fluency, with respect to an interpretation in discourse and oral producing. The main strategy the dissertation adopts to do this is to analyze Levelt’s speaking model and some other interrelated theories and the process of SL oral producing models. Since the psychological and logical theories show that thing’s changing lies in its intrinsic motivation and we know from our own experience that if we fail to catch onto the beginning of an utterance, it is often difficult to segment or identify the subsequent oral speaking stream. Oral speaking understanding system, from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge does not work strictly left-to-right. Again if the speech is being produced with regard to contextual constraints, then it is
going to be difficult to successfully recognize speech without speaker’s self-willingness incorporating these constraints into oral processing.

The study on self-willing motivation affecting SL oral fluency is not so easy to state from the theoretical mechanism that is partly because of the vagueness of many of concepts that have been investigated. This is reflected in a common refrain in the research literature that the rests chosen to measure a particular concept may not have been valid. Another reason lies in the interrelatedness of the various factors. But, since everyone knows that participating in the whole process of SL oral producing is connected tightly with the speaker’s willingness, with the effort of language producer. If want to utter discourse fluently, the language producer should plunge himself in with great willingness. The desire coming from intrinsic of a learner can motivate him to overcome various factors helping language develop fast. Just as logical theory says things change because of their intrinsic motivation not extrinsic one. So without students’ self-willing motivation, no matter how new your teaching technology is, how scientific, available your knowledge is, your achievement is in vain.

Further implication, then, I hope, while studying on SL oral fluency and self-willing motivation, teachers may find out some other more best explanations for it, and some more best teaching strategies to improve students’ oral abilities. And I hope that it can stir up some linguists’ debate on it. Just as Schmidt(1992) mentioned. it may turn out that such research on oral fluency can also contribute to the discussion of current issues raised by general theories of skill development. Meanwhile I hope it can push SL oral producing research which is in the making in China in depth. Finally I have to say perhaps there are some mistakes in the dissertation. I’m very appreciate to have my fellow teachers’ comments.
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