

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRONUNCIATION

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### ABSTRACT

Preparing students psychologically is a necessary correlate to improving their pronunciation. Personal identity and attitude toward the L2 culture pronunciation learning goes deeper than merely acquiring something new; it encompasses the whole being and has an impact on the learner's identity.

**Keywords:** Nonlinguistic factors, psychological, extrinsic motives, consciously or unconsciously, native-like pronunciation, self-esteem, cautiousness, anxiety, motivation, intrinsic motives, self-efficacy.

### INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Nonlinguistic factors related to an individual's personality and learning goals, can also support or impede pronunciation production and are at present receiving more attention in second language acquisition research. Preparing students psychologically is a necessary correlate to improving their pronunciation. Personal identity and attitude toward the L2 culture pronunciation learning goes deeper than merely acquiring something new; it encompasses the whole being and has an impact on the learner's identity [1, 123-125p.]. Learners who wish to retain identification with their own culture or social category may consciously or unconsciously retain a foreign accent as a marker of in-group affiliation. Taking on a new accent implies a certain readiness for taking on a different identity revealing a high amount of "integrativeness," in the world of performing arts, the term used is "empathy". Similarly, the ability to approximate native-like pronunciation in a second language is related to the flexibility or permeability of one's ego boundaries [7, 36-38p.]. To speak an L2 like a native is to take a drastic step into the unknown, accompanied by the unconscious fear of no return... It seems to be very likely that a L2 learner, who protests his/her wish to pronounce it correctly, is doing just that. He/she is saying 'I wish I could/would allow myself to pronounce it authentically' and not "I want to pronounce it authentically" Self-Esteem, Cautiousness: Without a strong sense of self-esteem or self-confidence, being able to assume or add a new identity to one's repertoire is difficult. There appears to be a predictive quality to the correlation between self-esteem and the ability to orally produce a second-language [2, 89-92p.]. Results indicate that students with high self-esteem received higher teacher oral production ratings than low self-esteem students. Without assuredness in oneself, cautiousness pervades, particularly in adult learners; there is a positive relationship between cautiousness and age of the adult learner.

**Anxiety:** Anxiety is common among second language learners and it is associated negatively with language performance. It often manifests itself in the physiological signs of the latter, with symptoms including perspiration, sweaty palms, dry mouth, muscle contractions and tension, and increases in heart and perspiration rates [3, 56-58p.]. Students with the highest levels of foreign language anxiety tended to have at least one of the following characteristics: older; high academic achievers; have never visited a foreign country; have not taken any high school foreign language courses; have low expectations of their overall average for their current language course; have a negative perception of their scholastic competence; and, have a

negative perception of their self-worth. Much anxiety research examines the correlates of second language acquisition but does not address its direct impact on pronunciation [4, 32-36p.]. However, it can be assumed that students will not achieve a high level of pronunciation in an anxious state and that a low-stress learning environment, such as created by the Linguistic Mimicry approach, is beneficial. Motivation: Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model on language learning focuses on language learning as a social psychological process. This model has undergone restructuring and enrichment resulting in a consensus that social components of the learning process now play a relatively smaller role than they did in Gardner's original model of motivation, with the exception of pronunciation [11, 132-134p.]. This seems to imply that pronunciation learning is separate from language learning in general and involves distinctive motivation parameters. Smit and Dalton (2000) adapted Gardner's model of motivation to include three components [13, 156-158p.]:

#### I. Subject-Related Factors (Pronunciation)

##### 1. Integrativeness

2. Intrinsic motives—self-determination, stable over time, being something almost like personality traits

3. Extrinsic motives—variable over time depending on which external benefit the learner finds important at a given moment (better pay, meeting syllabus requirements, getting along in a foreign society, and so forth.)

#### II. Learner-Related Factors (Pronunciation)

These four factors describe different parameters of the individual's affective and/or cognitive evaluative perceptions of their personal pronunciation learning process:

1. Language use anxiety; students' fears connected with having to use the L2

2. Cognitively based self-perception of L2 accent, i.e., the students' self-evaluation of their pronunciation in relation to others and the norm

3. Causal attribution—the reasons students put forth for (not) succeeding in attaining the learning goal

4. Self-efficacy; refers to an individual's beliefs that he or she has the capability to reach a certain level of performance or achievement.

#### III. Classroom Related Factors (Pronunciation)

##### 1. Goals

##### 2. Learning Strategies

##### 3. Teachers' feedback and teaching styles

Smit and Dalton summarize that the most striking differences of language learning motivation in general can be found among the subject-related ones above. "While extrinsic and intrinsic motives are part and parcel of successful language learning as such, the learners' type and degree of integrativeness has been described as particularly important for pronunciation learning". Flege et al identified factors designated "integrative motivation" and "concern for L2 pronunciation" as significant predictors of degree of L2 foreign accent. To summarize, affective factors that impact pronunciation acquisition are not dependent on biological constraints [9, 148-151p.]. Attitude toward the target language, culture, and native speakers; degree of acculturation (including exposure to and use of the target language); personal identity issues; and motivation for learning can all support or impede acquisition. The work on pronunciation "needs to be tied in with work on the individual's value set, attitudes and socio-cultural schemata," and that targets for pronunciation teaching should be appropriate for the particular sociological context in which the teaching takes place [10, 89-92p.]. Linguistic mimicry addresses psychological factors of pronunciation through the use of dramatic techniques that offer a low-stress environment to diminish students' anxiety and enhance empathy, or integrativeness. Through linguistic mimicry, students stay motivated.

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