

The Relationship Between Korean Speaking Anxiety and Oral Proficiency among Korean Majors in Chinese Undergraduate Programs

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Abstract. At present, the relationship between foreign language speaking anxiety and speaking performance is a hot topic in second language acquisition research, but most related studies focus on English, and there is relatively little empirical research in minor languages such as Korean. Therefore, this study takes Chinese undergraduate students majoring in Korean as its subjects, exploring the relationship between their Korean speaking anxiety and speaking performance, and analyzing the causes and mechanisms of speaking anxiety from the perspectives of language features, language negative transfer, and learner psychology. The results show that Korean grammatical structures, the honorific system, and Chinese-Korean negative language transfer can trigger speaking anxiety, while learners' fear of negative evaluation is a key psychological factor affecting speaking performance. Accordingly, this study proposes targeted teaching suggestions from the aspects of language, transfer, and psychology, aiming to alleviate speaking anxiety and transform it into learning motivation. This study is expected to enrich empirical evidence on anxiety in non-global languages and provide references for optimizing Korean speaking teaching and talent cultivation.

1 Introduction

Against the background of globalization and deepening regional cooperation, the exchanges between China and South Korea are increasingly close. As the core of cross-cultural communication, Korean oral ability has become the key quality of high-quality Korean professionals. However, in the process of second language acquisition, foreign language anxiety, especially oral anxiety, has been widely proven to be a key emotional factor hindering language output and reducing learning performance [1]. Existing empirical studies have shown that small language learners generally have moderate or above Oral Anxiety, and anxiety characteristics are closely related to language characteristics [2]. For Korean, which has a complex honorific system and unique pronunciation rules, learners' communicative fear dimension scores are significantly high, mainly due to their concern about the use of honorifics and improper cultural expression [3]. At the same time, the characteristics of small language learning groups and frequent classroom interaction also aggravate learners' fear of

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negative evaluation. In terms of the relationship between anxiety and performance, a large number of empirical studies show that there is a significant negative correlation between them, in which fear of communication and fear of negative evaluation have the most prominent negative impact on oral performance [4]. High anxiety learners are prone to problems such as stuck expression, lack of vocabulary and increased grammatical errors, which directly reduce the fluency, accuracy and appropriateness of oral English [5]. However, the current research on Foreign Language Oral Anxiety mostly takes English as the target language [6]. In view of the significant differences between Korean and English in language structure, cultural background and other aspects, there is a relative lack of research on its learner-specific oral anxiety and its relationship with oral performance [3]. Based on this, this paper will focus on Korean, a non lingua franca, systematically sort out the relationship between Foreign Language Oral Anxiety and achievement, and put forward reasonable teaching suggestions, to provide an empirical basis for Korean teaching, and ultimately serve the cultivation of Korean talents.

2 The impact of foreign language oral anxiety on academic performance

At present, the issue of the relationship between oral English anxiety and performance has been widely studied by the academic community. At present, a large number of empirical studies show that there is a significant negative correlation between Foreign Language Oral Anxiety and oral performance [7]. Phillips proposed in 1992 that there was a significant correlation between oral anxiety and oral performance, and there was a significant negative correlation ($r=-0.40$, $P<0.01$). He found that learners with high anxiety had significantly lower scores than those with low anxiety in grammar, vocabulary, fluency and other indicators. Moreover, learners with higher oral anxiety have lower oral performance. After the teacher has taken measures to relieve anxiety, students still believe that the oral interaction process is a high-anxiety and tense experience [8].

In addition, Krashen's affective filter hypothesis also provides a theoretical basis for understanding the impact of anxiety. This hypothesis believes that high anxiety will strengthen the affective filtering effect and hinder the internalization of language input and the quality of output, which is more significant in small language learning [9]. Not only that, Yoo, taking learners in Taiwan as the object, confirmed that anxiety would occupy learners' limited cognitive processing resources, damage the processing efficiency of language input, and thus have an impact on oral performance.

In 1986, Horwitz et al. First defined foreign language anxiety as a unique and complex self-perception, emotion and behavior related to the classroom context arising from the process of foreign language learning [1]. On this basis, Horwitz et al. Put forward the three-dimensional theory of foreign language anxiety, which provides the core theoretical support for the follow-up study of anxiety. They divided oral foreign language anxiety into three core dimensions, namely, fear of communication, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. At the same time, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by the research team has been verified by a large number of empirical studies to have good reliability and validity, and has become a standardized measurement tool to quantify Foreign Language Oral Anxiety [1].

3 Analysis of causes

3.1 Characteristics of language

The different characteristics of language expression in different countries will affect learners' knowledge construction and lead to anxiety. Therefore, when analyzing the causes of anxiety, the language characteristics of the target language is also an important analysis dimension. As the official language of the Korean Peninsula, Korean has a profound historical accumulation, a highly standardized honorific system, and systematic pronunciation rules. These cultural characteristics make Korean a unique identity of the Korean nation, but they also bury the hidden danger of anxiety for non-native learners to learn Korean.

First of all, there are differences in language expression between Korean and Chinese, especially in the polite expression system. In Korean, the polite expression of honorifics is very particular. Honorifics are a part of grammar and form a strict system. When using Korean for language expression, the speaker needs to choose the appropriate honorific expression according to the age, generation, social status and kinship of the dialogue object. In Chinese, speakers often express politeness by lexicalizing honorifics, which is not grammatically mandatory. Does this reduce the "honorific anxiety" of Chinese speakers to some extent? On the contrary, when Chinese learners learn Korean, it is easy to increase the oral burden because there is no corresponding grammaticalized honorific system in their mother tongue. Secondly, there are differences in word order between Korean and Chinese (SVO in Chinese and SOV in Korean). Compared with learners with the same word order, Chinese Korean learners need to undergo structural transformation in sentence organization, which increases the burden of language conversion, reduces the efficiency of language conversion, and thus lowers language performance. According to the three-stage model of cognitive processing, anxiety, as a negative emotion, reduces the efficiency of language processing in all three stages of speech input, processing, and output. The language characteristics of Korean only increase the difficulty of processing, burden the expression of Chinese Korean language majors, and thus increase oral anxiety [10].

Moreover, the unique pronunciation rules of Korean have also become one of the causes of anxiety. The complex linking rules of Korean and the changes of the tight and aspirated sounds are the phonetic systems that Chinese Korean learners need to adapt to. When speaking, learners tend to be unsure of their pronunciation accuracy, which aggravates learners' fear of negative evaluation.

3.2 Language transfer

Language transfer is a common phenomenon in language learning. It mainly refers to the fact that learners are influenced by their mother tongue or other acquired languages when acquiring a second language. From the perspective of influence on nature, language transfer can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer. When learning a second language, when the mother tongue and the second language have similar language characteristics, the mother tongue experience can promote learning and form a positive transfer. However, when the two languages are quite different, the mother tongue habit is unfavorable to language learning and forms a negative transfer. The positive and negative transfer of language will have different effects on students' second language acquisition.

Because Korea and China belong to the Chinese cultural circle, 60% of the words in the Korean vocabulary are Chinese words, so these Chinese words have a certain corresponding relationship with Chinese in form, meaning and pronunciation. This positive transfer in the early stage of learning helps to increase the efficiency of Chinese Korean Learners' understanding of words, helps to rapidly expand the Korean vocabulary, and reduces the level of anxiety to a certain extent.

However, negative transfer is the key factor affecting Korean oral anxiety. A large number of Chinese characters have the phenomenon of "homonymy", that is, the form is similar but the meaning is different. For example, the Korean word "Ho Ho", the Chinese character is Madame, because its pronunciation is also similar to the Chinese word "Madame", the Chinese people are easy to think that the word is Madame by first instinct, but the correct Korean meaning refers to someone else's wife. This may greatly lead to learners' communicative errors due to "literal meaning", and then avoid oral interaction scenes due to embarrassment and frustration, thus reducing oral performance. In addition, the transfer of the pronunciation system will also interfere with the learning of Chinese and Korean learners. Unlike Korean, there is no tone of tension in Chinese, and the opposition between radio and vowel sounds. Therefore, if Chinese learners stick to the pronunciation habits of Chinese, they will not be able to distinguish the tone of tension and lose rhythm in the process of Korean learning. This is the most typical negative transfer phenomenon. Moreover, the difference in word order will magnify the negative part of language transfer. Chinese adopts the structure of "subject predicate object" (SVO), while Korean follows the word order of "subject object predicate" (SOV), and the verb is placed after the object. This means that Chinese learners need to make real-time word order conversion while outputting vocabulary in oral production. The inherent word order of Chinese makes it easy to produce a certain "resistance" to the conversion. Word order transformation will occupy limited cognitive memory resources, increase processing difficulty and interfere with language processing in the cognitive processing stage, thus amplifying the influence of anxiety, causing problems such as stuck expression and increased grammatical errors, directly reducing the fluency, accuracy and appropriateness of oral English, thus affecting language performance [11].

3.3 Learner psychology

According to the existing research, small language learners generally have more than moderate oral anxiety [12]. To sum up, if language characteristics and transfer effect are the external factors of anxiety, and learners' psychology is the key internal factor of anxiety formation. Different from the objective of language characteristics and transfer effect, learners' psychology is subjective and complex, so exploring learners' psychology is also an important dimension for academic circles to study the correlation between anxiety and achievement.

From the psychological perspective, oral performance is influenced by learners' individual differences and anxiety. For example, individual perfectionism tendency is also one of the important reasons for anxiety. Gregersen and Horwitz found that learners with perfectionism tend to have a high level of anxiety due to excessive attention to language accuracy and low tolerance for errors [10]. Perfectionists tend to perceive the risk of making mistakes due to the complex honorific system in the process of Korean learning, which aggravates anxiety.

At the same time, oral performance is also closely related to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in completing tasks independently. However, a large number of empirical studies have shown that there is a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety. For example, Kim Haeryeong's survey of Chinese Korean majors in 2023 found that learners with high anxiety and low self-efficacy lacked confidence in their oral ability. In order to avoid negative evaluations, they were prone to avoid social scenes and form a vicious circle [9]. In the context of East Asian culture, which emphasizes interpersonal harmony, the dimension of negative evaluation has a particularly prominent impact on Chinese and Korean learners. Learners tend to be particularly sensitive to the signals of the most negative evaluation. For example, teachers' open error correction

and the expression of doubt of the other party may aggravate learners' fear of negative evaluation when they interact with Koreans.

Moreover, risk-taking is also the only significant variable of oral performance. Risk-taking refers to the tendency to take risks to try unknown expressions and use new language forms in language learning interaction scenarios. Pyun et al. In the research on KFL learners in North America as the research object, showed that anxiety and risk-taking were significantly negatively correlated [3]. This important finding reveals the path of anxiety affecting learners' oral performance. Anxiety does not directly damage oral performance, but indirectly affects learners' behavior choices. This risk avoidance behavior is also common in Korean learning situations. Chinese and Korean learners may be unfamiliar with the honorific system and tend to choose the simple sentence patterns and familiar vocabulary they have mastered, to avoid trying new expressions. This behavior seems safe, but the conservative way of withholding oral expression limits the performance of Korean oral expression.

4 Suggestions

4.1 Teaching intervention based on linguistic features

Based on the existing empirical research, students' fear of negative evaluation is the main source of oral anxiety, rather than language learning itself. Korean, as an adhesive language, has distinct grammar rules and language structure, which may also cause oral anxiety.

Therefore, Korean teachers should focus on the interpretation and analysis of Korean grammar and language structure.

First of all, teachers should make it clear that it is not difficult to learn Korean, but that students find it easy to feel anxious about the negative evaluation system. Therefore, teachers should adjust appropriately. It is a normal idea to output errors to students in the classroom environment. They should be tolerant of students who make grammatical errors, avoid public error correction, and give students room for fault tolerance. Over time, this concept can relieve students' pressure on Perfectionism and fear of negative evaluation, shift the excessive attention to others' evaluation, and focus on their own growth. In view of the complexity and variability of Korean pronunciation, teachers should step by step based on students' acceptance ability. At the primary stage, teachers can focus on cultivating students' ability to distinguish pronunciation, and then focus on cultivating students' pronunciation.

4.2 Teaching intervention based on language transfer

Based on the language transfer phenomenon between Korean and Chinese mentioned above, teachers should start by improving teaching methods to help students identify and overcome the learning obstacles caused by the negative language transfer phenomenon.

According to the negative transfer phenomenon of language, Chinese Korean majors are prone to make literal errors on some Chinese words in the process of Korean learning. Therefore, teachers can collect students' common wrong Chinese characters and words, summarize and sort them out, explain them in class and help students understand them. Based on the difference in word order between Chinese and Korean, Korean teachers can provide students with fixed sentence patterns and fixed collocations of sentences commonly used in life scenes to help students reduce the burden of language processing caused by the difference in word order. At the same time, guide students to observe the differences between Korean and Chinese in life scenes, so as to integrate Korean thinking into students' lives in a clever way, and initially cultivate students' Korean thinking.

4.3 Teaching interventions based on learners' psychology

As a guide for Chinese Korean majors, Korean teachers have a vital impact on students' Korean learning. Therefore, teachers should pay more attention to students' learning psychology and help students overcome difficulties in the process of learning. In the early stage of Korean learning, teachers should improve the evaluation methods to avoid students' pressure for negative evaluation. Teachers should encourage students to make mistakes, and reasonably guide students to regard mistakes as an opportunity to find problems, so as to encourage instead of criticizing, and establish students' correct "error view". Guide students to decompose complex tasks into simple tasks, and obtain a sense of satisfaction and achievement from simple tasks, so as to improve their sense of self-efficacy. Make students think "I can" in their heart, so as to provide spontaneity and initiative for students' oral adventure behavior.

5 Conclusion

This paper systematically reviews the existing empirical studies on Korean Oral Anxiety and Korean oral performance, demonstrates the relationship between oral communication and performance, and analyzes the reasons. It also analyzes the mechanism of anxiety of Chinese Korean learners when learning Korean from the three dimensions of Korean language characteristics and language transfer learners' psychology. The empirical study shows that the complex honorific system of Korean, the negative transfer of Chinese words and the individual psychological quality of learners jointly affect the anxiety of Chinese majors. Based on the above summary, this paper puts forward some suggestions: It can investigate the effect of emotion regulation intervention strategies proposed by previous studies, and study and observe the anxiety characteristics of learners with different target languages and language levels. Finally, it is expected that more research will focus on Korean, a non-universal language, and the learner's unique emotional experience can be valued, which will provide a richer theoretical basis for optimizing Korean teaching practice.

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