

Anxiety and Self-Perceived L2 Proficiency: A Comparison of Which Can Better Predict L2 Pronunciation Performance

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Abstract : The development of L2 pronunciation competence remains understudied in the literature and it is not clear what may influence learners' development of L2 pronunciation. The present study was an attempt to find out which of the two common factors in L2 acquisition, i.e., foreign language anxiety or self-perceived L2 proficiency, can better predict Chinese EFL learners' pronunciation performance. 78 first-year English majors, who had received a three-month pronunciation training course, were asked to 1) fill out a questionnaire on foreign language classroom anxiety, 2) self-report their L2 proficiency in general, in speaking and in pronunciation, and 3) complete an oral and a written test on their L2 pronunciation (the score of the oral part indicates participants' pronunciation proficiency in oral production, and the score of the written part indexes participants' ability in applying pronunciation knowledge in comprehension.) Results showed that the pronunciation scores were negatively correlated with the anxiety scores, and were positively correlated with the self-perceived pronunciation proficiency. But only the written scores in the L2 pronunciation test, not the oral scores, were positively correlated with the L2 self-perceived general proficiency. Neither the oral nor the written scores in the L2 pronunciation test had a significant correlation with the self-perceived speaking proficiency. Given the fairly strong correlations, the anxiety scores and the self-perceived pronunciation proficiency were put in regression models to predict L2 pronunciation performance. The anxiety factor alone accounted for 13.9% of the variance and the self-perceived pronunciation proficiency alone explained 12.1% of the variance. But when both anxiety scores and self-perceived pronunciation proficiency were put in a stepwise regression model, only the anxiety scores had a significant and unique contribution to the L2 pronunciation performance (4.8%). Taken together, the results suggested that the learners' anxiety level could better predict their L2 pronunciation performance, compared with the self-perceived proficiency levels. The obtained data have the following pedagogical implications. 1) Given the fairly strong correlation between anxiety and L2 pronunciation performance, the instructors who are interested in predicting learners' L2 pronunciation proficiency may measure their anxiety level, instead of their proficiency, as the predicting variable. 2) The correlation of oral scores (in the pronunciation test) with pronunciation proficiency, rather than with speaking proficiency, indicates that a) learners after receiving some amounts of training are to some extent able to evaluate their own pronunciation ability, implying the feasibility of incorporating self-evaluation and peer comments in course instruction; b) the 'proficiency' measure used to predict pronunciation performance should be used with caution. The proficiency of specific skills seemingly highly related to pronunciation (i.e., speaking in this case) may not be taken for granted as an effective predictor for pronunciation performance. 3) The correlation between the written scores with general L2 proficiency is interesting.

Keywords : anxiety, Chinese EFL learners, L2 pronunciation, self-perceived L2 proficiency

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