

Cognitive and Emotional Barriers in Second Language Learning: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract: The study investigates the interdependent nature of cognitive and emotional barriers in second language (L2) learning from a psychological perspective. While prior research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has focused heavily on linguistic competence and language structure, the psychological dimensions of learning remain underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how cognitive factors such as working memory limitations interact with emotional challenges like anxiety and stress to impede language acquisition. Drawing upon theoretical models in cognitive psychology and supported by a large-scale questionnaire, the study aims to provide a holistic view of the psychological hurdles L2 learners encounter. Findings indicate that cognitive and emotional barriers often function in tandem, influencing learner performance and motivation. The study further emphasizes the need for pedagogical strategies tailored to individual learner differences, offering practical implications for language educators to create supportive learning environments. The research underscores the importance of integrating both cognitive and emotional perspectives to enhance L2 learning outcomes and bridge the divide between theory and practice in language education.

Keywords: *Second Language Acquisition, Cognitive Barriers, Emotional Barriers, Working Memory, Language Anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

The multifaceted nature of challenges language learners face encompasses a myriad of cognitive and emotional barriers. From limited vocabulary to low self-confidence, these barriers do not operate independently. When explored from a psychological standpoint, the complex and dialectical interplay between cognitive and emotional barriers emerges. Despite the ongoing debate about the relationship between cognition and emotion, the role of cognitive barriers can explain the emotional process, such as frustration and anxiety. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding, it is crucial to investigate both cognitive and emotional barriers in L2 learning simultaneously. By and large, the

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purpose of the current study, therefore, is to provide a psychological perspective which fills in the aforementioned gap. This study was grounded in the assumption that cognitive and emotional barriers interdependently function and hence aimed to explore the nature of these barriers when they are co-occurring. Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have been primarily concerned with propositional and procedural knowledge of language structure.

1. Cognitive Theories of Second Language Learning

The cognitive theories that attempt to explain how learners acquire a second language and what is learned during the acquisition process are surveyed in this section. Some of the basic elements that make-up a language are outlined in terms of these theories. In doing so, cognitive models will be introduced and some basic ideas about the function and structure of language can be there in order to feed into the discussion of learning. Further there will be the relevance of cognitive models to an analysis of what learners are capable of for the purposes of learning (Abdel Aziz Metwalli, 2011). The following discussion is based on a view of how learners receive, process and learn language built up over many years of second language teaching and research. In an attempt to clarify this view, the presentation of cognitive models is accompanied by certain terminological constraints related to them. Second language (L2) learning is obviously a concern in a multi-lingual society with various cognitive models existing according to different stages of complexity and variation. Sequencing is also vital for the understanding of models and the level of proficiency of language learners. At this point, learners need mechanisms that allow incoming information to be stored and manipulated in memory (Azhar, 2015). This section provides a framework for understanding cognitive barriers, which can render this type of learning impossible or extremely difficult. A more detailed exploration of cognitive barriers will be discussed in the following section. Broadly speaking, this view of how learners might internalise language is described how knowledge of language may transfer from the first language to the second, or later language, and how it may eventually develop into Autonomous skills in writing and speaking.

2. Cognitive Barriers in Second Language Learning

When learning a second language, specific cognitive difficulties are encountered in the acquisition of the target language. It is important for language educators and learners to have a good understanding of these barriers, which can help the learners to develop effective learning strategies and the educators to devise better teaching methodologies. Working memory constraints are believed to affect the processing and retention of language's input material, particularly in the study of texts or narratives. Language learners process the sounds and meanings of the words they hear and read by resorting to an intricate system of working memory resources. On the other hand, the demand for holding more and more items in working memory may result in faster item decay, earlier displacement, and interference, therefore making the learning and retention of new input material more difficult. In the context of a dual-task experiment, there is evidence that working memory is not only engaged in first but also second language sentence comprehension. While interference from an already acquired first language is a well-known and extensively researched phenomenon, the role that the subject's memory constraints on working memory and other cognitive resources play in the avoidance of language transfer has not been equally investigated. The acceptance that interference is modulated by individual

differences has noteworthy implications for issues of language learning and teaching. Larger efforts should be made to help learners bypass their natural working memory constraints and emphasize noticing strategies, whereas language teaching methodology should avoid facilitating the activation of language transfer. Cognitive barriers to second language learning reflect the intricacy of psycholinguistic processes (Roberts, 2012).

3. Emotional Barriers in Second Language Learning

As has been well documented, the acquisition of a second language can be exceptionally challenging in light of the multitude of cognitive, emotional, and social factors that can impede successful language learning (Byrd & Abrams, 2022). From a psychological standpoint, the emotional barriers associated with learning a second language are of particular interest since the intensity of an emotional experience can have a significant impact on the cognitive processes that underlie learning (Uysal & Güven, 2018). It has been suggested that emotions can serve as an affective filter, or a mental barrier governing the acquisition of a second language by learners whose stress and anxiety prevent new linguistic input from being converted into long-term memory.

Cognitive and emotional barriers might have effects on both adults and children in learning a foreign language. Emotional factors play significant roles in learning a second language. It has been widely accepted that emotions coexist with cognition, motivation, and other mental aspects. Anxiety is a common phenomenon in foreign language classrooms. It is defined as a state of distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear, hence it functions as a barrier to learning, communication, and performance. It is suggested that foreign language anxiety is a complex emotional response to language study because of the unique setting of the language classroom. Meanwhile, when foreign language learners cannot understand what is being said or become hesitant, anxious feelings are often aroused because they worry about the possible negative emotions of other students as the result of the lack of understanding or hesitation. The affective aspect of language, such as nervousness and worry of students, are treated as category of anxiety, and the psychological and emotional reactions of fear in a second language learning environment may well have a potential deleterious influence on learning.

4. Strategies for Overcoming Cognitive and Emotional Barriers

Both cognitive and emotional barriers exist in psychology. Learning any language involves different cognitive and emotional processes. Language learners are often faced with complex environments, accent problems, speaking problems, and reading problems which can cause cognitive barriers. Emotional memory focusing on the subject can be aroused regardless of the actual external stimuli. It is therefore essential for a person to create his or her own emotional memory for the learning process. In other words, the person inserts himself into the task environment and determines the other elements of the task environment. By associating the concepts with this situation, he is in a process of remembering more easily and for a longer time. Language learning is not a “task-focused” process. Language learning can often cause emotional barriers before he falls out of love, his dislike, and his interest in the subject diminishes. As self-esteem reduction continues in this and similar negative situations, it ceases to be an easy thing to return to love for the work. Even though a person falls in love again, it is difficult and takes a long time to reach the initial stage again. It is difficult to manage

well in learning environments, especially against such a process, and it is necessary to invest a lot in order to prevent the collapse of love. But if the environment in which the person is an emotional barrier is organized positively, he observes that the cognitive barriers decrease to a great extent and even lead to walking in a more successful way. (Byrd & Abrams, 2022) studied second language classroom anxiety with an emphasis on English language teaching students at a South African university. Data was gathered through informal biographical interviews and oral narrative reports.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The purpose of this paper has been to focus on cognitive and emotional barriers as separate, but concurrently occurring, and interacting issues in language acquisition and to consider them in a psychological perspective. Doing so, a comprehensive outlook on language barriers consisted of cognitive factors, such as motivation, anxiety, memory and attitude and perceptual, socio-cognitive, and learning strategy issues, as well as emotional dimension, composed of negative feelings like annoyance, shame, and fear, has been presented. The main conclusion to be drawn is that in order to increase teacher knowledge about different types of barriers, solely linguistic skills are not enough. In teaching foreign languages, one ought to be a good psychologist as well. It is not possible to fully ensure satisfactory second language learning outcomes without addressing these barriers and having understanding of how they interact. While cognitive barriers are more apparent and argumentatively observable, success in a second language learning is equally dependent on overcoming emotional barriers: Relations between cognition and emotion have been investigated to a great extent also in other areas of psychology, and results imply that having both cognitive and emotional disorders may have an even more deteriorative impact. Hence, a feasible future avenue may be exploring how the interplay of cognitive and emotional factors influence each other and the learning of a foreign language in consequence.

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