



On Debilitating Approach Towards Learning Anxiety Through Dynamicity in Storch(2002) Interaction Model: Oscillation Signifies

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the prominence of language learning anxiety as the hindering factor that debilitates the learning process and is to be managed successfully through the Storch model (2002). The four phases of the Storch Model should not be considered fixed and stable; hence, they could be behaved dynamically. The present study was conducted in delving into the issue by having randomly assigned two identical groups of 23 intermediate EFL learners at Islamic Azad University as the control group and experimental one. The participants were all majoring in English translation discipline and participated in a conversation course. The study was in pre-test and post-test design and a learning anxiety questionnaire was administered before and after the treatment. The experimental group received treatment according to the dynamicity stance of Storch's (2002) patterns of interaction coding scheme as collaborative, expert/novice, dominant/dominant, and dominant/passive. The experimental group outperformed the control group. The findings showed that the application of the dynamicity approach towards the Storch model would diminish the learning anxiety index to a large extent. The results embracing Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory along the pedagogical implication would be beneficial for teachers, syllabus designers, and materials developers in the TEFL field.

KEYWORDS: Dynamicity; Language Learning Anxiety; Oscillation; Storch Interaction Model

INTRODUCTION

Learning is a complex process in which social context plays a significant role in making it happen. To social interactionists, the nature of the learning phenomenon is considered a social act that cannot be viable in a solitary fashion as Roberson (2014) puts "a solitary demonstration of individual knowledge" (p.1). The learning process as a social act requires the right place to bloom and be demonstrated and manifested as the classrooms to be considered as "essentially social events" (Block, 1996, p. 76). The learners in the social events are from different societal groups and various walks of life with different background knowledge of the world and personal experiences. Accordingly, language learners might be involved in different types and levels of interactions. Each and every interaction might not work, provided that they are of meaningful types, i.e., multiple meaningful interactions result



in meaningful learning processes and manifestations (Brooks, 1990). So, from the social interactionist point of view, the teachers play a significant role in leading the learners in establishing meaningful and authentic interactions.

In line with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) (1978) which emphasizes the prominence of response and feedback from the instructors and also peers, scholars such as Donato (1994) clarify that language learners would be engaged in meaning-negotiation and hypothesis-testing while establishing a meaningful interaction in the social events of the classroom with peers. The teacher response and the peer response the language learners receive would be regarded as the authentic body of learning theme (Roberson, 2014). The point is that such meaningful interactions with peers and instructors seem to lack a triggering agenda in order to be considered a successful interaction promoting language learning. That is to say, the so-called peer responses and meaningful interactions do not necessarily assist or scaffold learners in the learning process (Liu, 2002). Such concern seems correct as there could be no supervision on the peers' responses as they may lead their meaningful interactions with peers to vague or undesired outcomes. In better words, in order for the peers' responses to meet the needs of the learning process, there should exist "multi-featured, triangulated projects that simultaneously consider feedback characteristics and outcomes" (Ferris, 2003 p. 85).

Some scholars (e.g. Liu 2002, Nelson & Murphy 1993) believe that the weak point lies in the collaboration feature of the responses issued by peers, meaning that responses from peers do not necessarily form a collaborative stance in the learning process. In order to explore the radical barrier of the peers' responses in not being successful to create collaborations as the outcomes of their interactions, a great body of research should be devoted to issues and constructs above and beyond the linguistic dynamics of the responses and interactions. Of course, language learning could be regarded as a stressful activity (Hewitt & Stefenson, 2011), and a great body of literature through studies conducted by prominent researchers (e.g., Phillips, 1992) is devoted to the notion of anxiety, the pattern of interactions performed in the social events of the classrooms is also the key feature in order to guarantee sustained collaborative interactions. The present study aimed at depicting the impact of exerting a dynamicity stance in employing Storch's(2002) model of interaction in order to shrink the learning anxiety of language learners in the learning process and to ascertain meaningful interactions in a sustained fashion of practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning a foreign or second language is a very complicated phenomenon as learning a language might entail some sort of anxiety for the learners in the long run (Andrade & William, 2009; Marwan, 2007). There has been a great body of studies around the world by scholars (Lan, 2010; Toghraee & Shahrokhi, 2014; Wang, 2005; Young, 1991) in search of finding proper ways to diminish the effects of anxiety notion in the language learning process of EFL learners. Ellis (2008) emphasized that the notion of anxiety must be considered as the affective aspect that has received the most attention in SLA. Many scholars believe that language learning anxiety is considered the negative emotional reaction which might happen during learning or using a new language (MacIntyre, 1999). To few scholars, the emergence of anxiety during language learning and language achievements is regarded as a positive facilitative notion (e.g., Liu, 2006; Oxford, 1999), hence, many scholars believe that the presence of anxiety should be regarded as a debilitating negative notion (e.g. Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). Of course, the level of language learning anxiety would become much less by the time the learners move towards proficiency. The notion of language learning anxiety is so highlighted for scholars that is labeled as the great barrier to foreign language achievement (Young, 1991) to the extent that the problems of low achievers language learners are first sought to reside in the learning anxiety realm (Horwitz, 2000, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999, 2002; Tóth, 2007).

Most scholars (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz, & Hope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) are concerned with two skills of listening and speaking as the skills most language learners experience language learning or using anxiety and have pivoted their studies on these two facets of language realms. Of course, listening and speaking skills could be regarded as active and online skills; hence, reading and writing are regarded as passive and offline skills. Once



delving into the different causes of language learning anxiety, three main constituents signify as fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and communication apprehension. Language learners might be afraid of their language levels being judged or evaluated by other onlookers as their teachers or peers or even parents which is called the fear of negative evaluation. Test anxiety embraces performance anxiety of getting bad marks on the tests or even failing the tests. Communication apprehension anxiety mostly occurs at the time of listening or speaking which the interlocutor experience due to losing track of the scenario or unpredictability of the utterances which demands prompt feedback and answer.

There exists a point of pondering here that anxiety and poverty in language learning are the two sides of a single coin which is crystal clear, thus, the dichotomy is that anxiety is the *result* of poverty in language learning or anxiety is the *cause* of poverty in language learning (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991). That is to say, once the learner is unable to properly go on with the language process of learning due to anxiety or s/he is suffering from a lack of confidence and cannot use the learned language properly due to low self-confidence. So such a lack of collaboration leads to accumulating anxiety. The collaboration issue is brought to attention through Storch Model as he proposes four tenets of interactions learners put on in their language learning and language use. Of course, this study embraces the Storch model in a debilitating fashion once the Storch model is looked upon through exerting a dynamicity perspective.

The notions of interaction and social interaction have been the focus of attention by many scholars as interaction plays a crucial role in institutionalizing the learning process and helping it happens. Interaction is meant the meaningful and purposeful interaction between the teacher and learners or even between two peers. Of course, meaningful interaction with peers has gained more popularity as it “operates on a more informal level than teacher response, provides a change from the more one-way interaction between the teacher and student” (Rollinson 2005, p.26). Peer interactions might also be interesting and less stressful for learners and make them motivated enough to face learning anxiety. Of course, through peers’ meaningful interaction, teachers feel a sense of relief from the “tedious and unrewarding chore” (Hyland 1990, p. 279), also beneficial for language learners themselves to set them free from the “death by the red pen” (Furneaux, 1999, p. 56). From the sociocultural perspective of Vygostky’s theory, the classroom settings as the social events are dynamic environments that provide “semiotic resources for students to interact with” (Watson 2007, p. 1). Through meaningful and purposeful interactions of learners with teachers and peers through a complex approach to learning a foreign or second language, “interactional competence” (Ohta, 2000) is energized and acquired. It should be highlighted here that through peer-peer collaborations, the desired competency is co-constructed and then internalized through recurring in the learning process, and last, would render the individual knowledge source (Dobao, 2012).

In the same vein, Swain (2000) justified the notion of ‘collaborative dialogue’, through which learners establish dialogues and interaction to build their body of knowledge. Most scholars (Donato, 1994; Storch, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 1998) are advocates of the collective behaviors of language learners to maintain collaborative dialogues because the language learners would have the opportunity to act at different levels of interactions with their peers in a stress-free fashion of conducting the meaningful interactions. In line with collaborative dialogues and interactions and in the same vein with the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, a comprehensive framework of interactions was proposed by Storch (2002) as the “pattern of interactions” through which, each language learner would be analyzed based on the linguistic characteristics of their interactions with other peers and highlighted that the learners’ negotiations on the basis of the level of intimacy among peers should not be neglected. She considered two indices of ‘equality’ and ‘mutuality’ for her “pattern of interactions”, as Equality meant “authority over the task or activity” and Mutuality referred to “the level of engagement with each other’s contribution” (p. 127). The two indices are in the format of continuums and are from high to low. Through the intersection of the two continuums,



Storch (2002) came up with a four-lobe interaction pattern, namely ‘collaborative’, ‘dominant/dominant’, ‘dominant/passive’, and ‘expert/novice’, as in Figure 1.

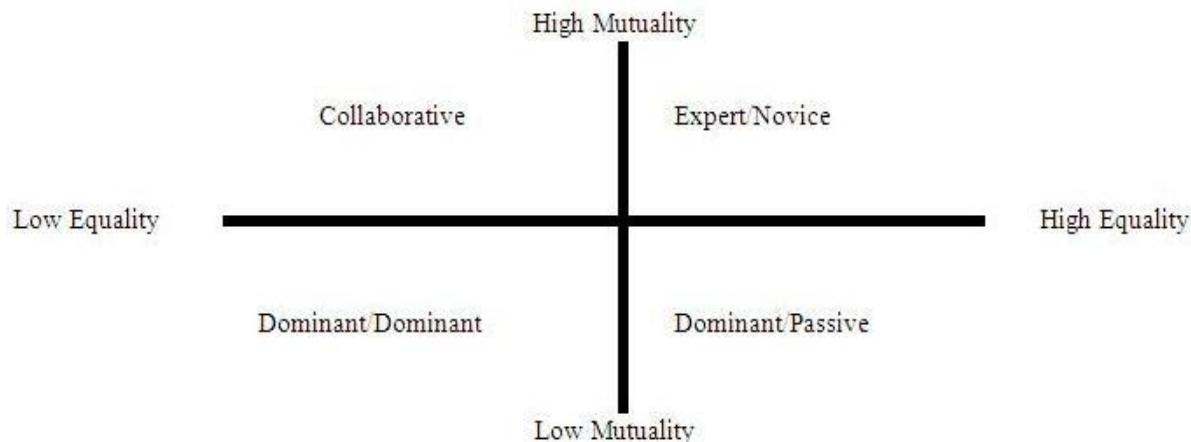


FIGURE 1. STORCH'S (2002) PATTERNS OF INTERACTION FRAMEWORK

There is a significant point here which is the aim of the present paper and that is: In Storch's (2002) patterns of interaction framework, it seems to be assumed that all learners would possess the same level of language proficiency, which could not be always true. That is to say, once a group of learners is labeled as intermediate, there might be rich-intermediate learners and poor-intermediate learners, and such richness and poorness are rooted in their knowledge and experiences of the world. No two identical learners are having the same level of weaknesses and strengths. Yet, in a classroom as a social event, and during its time span, there may be the opportunity for various topics proposed pre-planned or out of the blue. So, personal experience and background knowledge of the world, on the learners' part, seems to be ignored. Supposedly a learner may not find himself interested in the topic being discussed at the moment and puts on a “Dominant/Passive” role and five minutes after that, a new topic would be proposed and the same learner has an interesting scenario and experience to share it with the class and peers, so he would put on “Collaborative” role and after he is through with the dissemination of his experience, he would put on another role in the interaction framework. The researchers believe that by exerting the dynamicity notion as the result of different background knowledge and experience of each individual, the EFL learners oscillate between the Storch four-lobe patterns of interaction framework, and in the long run, the language learning process would be paved through the debilitating fashion of practice regarding learning anxiety index. On this aim and to cover the objectives of the present study, the researchers proposed a prominent research question:

RESEARCH QUESTION

RQ – Does oscillating between mutual equality and equal mutuality in Storch's (2002) interaction model have statistically any significant impact on debilitating language learning anxiety of EFL learners in Iran?

METHOD DESIGN

The present study utilizes a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test research design with two groups of participants. In order to ensure the comparability of the participants prior to the treatment, participants in both experimental and control groups were given a pretest of OPT and Language Learning Anxiety Questionnaire and at the end of the study, a posttest of Language Learning Anxiety Questionnaire was administered to measure the effect of the treatment.



PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the present study were selected through a convenient sampling method and the available 46 senior EFL learners majoring in English translation discipline, Islamic Azad University of Tehran who were at intermediate level of language proficiency were divided into two groups of 23 learners as one experimental and one control group. They were ranging from 19 to 31 years old and were all native speakers of Persian and were 33 female and 13 male university students. Both groups were randomly assigned to participate in two separate conversation courses.

INSTRUMENTS

Oxford Placement Test (OPT) – For checking the language proficiency level of the participants in the present study, the researcher administered an OPT to make sure that all the participants attending the study were at intermediate level and their scores fell between 50 to 60 out of 120 which is the intermediate band in OPT scoring system.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) - The FLCAS questionnaire was used in the present study. This questionnaire was designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) consisting of 33 items. The items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). One of the reasons for using this scale was that it has been one of the most comprehensive and valid instruments for measuring students' anxiety in classroom contexts. It also displayed favorable reliability coefficients. Nakayama (2007) reported the Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire as follows: Future Use Anxiety ($\alpha = .933$) and In Class Anxiety ($\alpha = .787$). The reliability coefficient of the FLCAS in this study was .921.

PROCEDURES

This study took 14 sessions of 90 minutes for both the experimental and control group attending the study. They were all informed about the confidentiality of their personal data and they all agreed to take part in the study. The first and last sessions of the classes were devoted to administering the Language Anxiety Questionnaire (FLCAS) as the pre-test and post-test of the present study. As mentioned earlier, both groups took part in an OPT to ascertain the language proficiency level of the participants as intermediate level. The participants in the experimental group were asked to come up with three subjects of speaking that they were interested in and had enough experience on them to discuss them in the class. Then the topics were gathered and listed for the teacher to organize the topic of conversations in the course accordingly so that each participant was responsible to handle and manage the conversation of his own interest and the teacher supervised the process and was present for probable misconceptions or any help in understanding the scenarios and keeping track of the conversations.

In the control group, the teachers handled the class in a conventional fashion and did not allow the participants to take control of the conversations for more than five to six sentences. The participants who were not interested in the topics or felt anxious about taking an active part in the conversation class were not forced to take part in the class and were left on their own. The reason for administering OPT was that such inactiveness would not be interpreted as a deficiency in their language proficiency level. This procedure was designed to spotlight the idea that each EFL learner does not follow a routine and fossilized interaction role, but in line with Storch's (2002) interaction framework and on the basis of the learners' interests and experience, the EFL learners' role might oscillate among the four patterns of interaction coding scheme as: collaborative, expert/novice, dominant/dominant, and dominant/passive. The result of such oscillations between mutual equality and equal mutuality would be manifested in overcoming the learning anxiety among EFL learners.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

First of all, the participants in both experimental and control groups were informed about the objectives of the study and the confidentiality of the personal and the study data. Then both groups participated in an OPT test of language proficiency level and after that, the language anxiety questionnaire (pre-test) was administered to both groups prior to the study. The last session of the conversation course was devoted to the administration of the same language anxiety questionnaire (post-test). A quantitative approach was held for data collection from the participants. Having collected the questionnaire from the participants of both experimental and control groups, the researchers scored the answer sheets and put the data into a spreadsheet program as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)



version 21. Then, descriptive statistics were computed and reported. The data underwent some descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mean, and standard deviation together with co-relational analyses. Then, for further inferential analyses, an independent-sample t-test was employed to explore the difference between experimental and control groups of Iranian EFL learners' language learning anxiety and to find the right answer to the research question.

RESULTS

As it is shown in Table 1, the participant's scores in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire for both experimental and control groups were almost the same in the pre-test phase at the onset of the present study. It means that there was no statistically significant difference between the participants in both groups concerning their level of language learning anxiety index, based on the observed significance (.153) which is larger than the probability level of .05.

Table 1. T-test for language learning Anxiety Pre-Test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Experimental	23	9.24	1.26	-1.450	44	.153
Control	23	9.76	1.26			

In order to find the impact of the treatment, the same Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire test as the pre-test was administered as the post-test. As shown in Table 2., based on the significance obtained from data analysis on the language anxiety test which is equal to 0.000, and comparing that with the alpha level which is 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the effect of oscillations between mutual equality and equal mutuality on overcoming the learning anxiety among EFL learners.

Table 2. T-test for language learning Anxiety Post-Test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Experimental	23	23.08	2.30	5.392	44	0.000
Control	23	19.36	2.56			

The result of the data analysis shows that the null hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between the effect of applying the treatment as oscillating between mutual equality and equal mutuality on debilitating language learning anxiety of EFL learners in experimental and control was rejected. It would be beneficial to summarize the results of the current study as the research question of the present study was related to whether oscillating between mutual equality and equal mutuality has a statistically significant impact on debilitating language learning anxiety of EFL learners in Iran. To answer the research question, the researcher tested two groups of participants namely experimental and control groups. The results of the current study revealed that the participants in the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores on the language anxiety post-test than the participants in the control group (in the experimental group, the mean for the language learning anxiety post-test was 23.08; in the control group, the mean for the language learning anxiety posttest was 19.36).



DISCUSSION

The rationale behind conducting the present study was that each and every language learner would tolerate some sort of anxiety once s/he gets involved in the process of learning a foreign language. Such anxiety may differ from one learner to another and from one topic to another. The anxiety level is rooted in the variations in the ZPDs of various learners might have while interacting with others. Background knowledge and personal experience play significant roles in minimizing the accompanying anxiety. The point is that through the Storch model of interaction, and by starting from the common grounds where language learners might have more interests or background knowledge, the teacher could make the social events of the classrooms so supportive and challenging for the language learners that most of the language learners could make the most of the class and in the same vein, moving from one topic to another one would be so interesting for the language learners that such remedy would make them all collaborative and dominant participants of the events and in the long run, act as a debilitating factor in lowering the learning anxiety of the language learners.

So far, there has been a plethora of studies conducted by scholars whose main focus of their studies was on the notion of anxiety and its correlation with the notion of gender. For instance, the research performed by Chang (1997) and Felson and Trudeau (1991) highlighted that female EFL learners had a higher level of anxiety, also the studies conducted by Allwright (2005) and Tahernezhad (2014) had the same result as female superiority on the level of language learning anxiety. In line with the previous studies, Öztürk and Gürbüz (2012) found that female EFL learners had experienced higher language learning anxiety. However, studies such as the one conducted by Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013) came up with a conflicting result as gender had statistically no effect on the index of language learning anxiety. Along the same line, the research conducted by Ghelichli (2022) highlighted that language proficiency and gender are not so fatal and important in lowering the language learning anxiety index of EFL learners in Iran, but the age factor plays a significant role in this regard. It could be stated that by proposing the notion of age, the researchers pinpointed the background, knowledge of the world, and experience of sociocultural events which are the focus of the present study.

Based on and in comparison with the scope of the present study, the present study has a closer look at the main factor which lowers the anxiety index of EFL learners as the interaction. In better words, the age factor could not be so decisive, consider the case that a middle-aged introvert individual who is deprived of effective communication with others and has very few interactions and experience with the people around him/her could not be in any sense compared to a same-aged extrovert outgoing person. The infrastructural reason lies in the interaction index. Age, being outgoing and introvert/extrovert, or other behavioral or personal characteristics could be manifested and encapsulated into the interaction index properly. That is to say, the interaction index of language learners would be so decisive and determining in engaging the EFL learners in the topics and encourage them to take active parts in isolation or collaboration with other individuals and in the long run, cut down on their anxiety levels to a large scale and significantly.

CONCLUSION

Although some prominent studies have been conducted on the notion of language learning anxiety in the Iranian EFL context (for instance, Alemi, Daftarifard, & Pashmforoosh, 2011; Ehsani & Jan-nesar Moghaddam, 2021; Ghelichli, Seyyedrezaei, Barani, & Mazandarani, 2020; Rastegar & Karami, 2015; Shahraki & Seyedrezaei, 2015; Zare & Riasati, 2012; Zhou, Xi, and Lochtman, 2020), few have considered the notion of anxiety to have a dynamic stance. In the present study, Storch's (2002) patterns of interaction amalgamated with the notion of language learning anxiety. By adding dynamicity to the above-mentioned Storch model, the spirit and mode of scaffolding would move around the social events (classrooms) because some peers have a better understanding of their classmates. In this sense, the language learners find the opportunity for scaffolding and they would feel a "sense of mutual development" (Zheng 2012, p.123). This way, language learners are provided with opportunities to collaborate with their peers mutually.



The important point to highlight here is that moving towards a more learner-centered fashion of conveying knowledge as leading a language classroom, there exist different layers of interactions while a topic is brought to the classroom setting. Different language learners with different background knowledge could act so collaborative even at the beginning of the foreign language acquisition process that "teachers can rely on this ability and engage young learners in joint problem-solving"(Ahmadian & Tajabadi, 2017 p.112). Such joint collaborations could be the best point of departure for diminishing the language learning anxiety of the participants, and once oscillation in joint collaborations rendered dominant in the classrooms by shifting from one language learner to another while changing the topics of interest, the cumulative effects are doubled and reinforced. Such reinforcement would be supportive enough to act as a debilitating hindrance to language learning anxiety.

The findings of the present study could be useful for various stakeholders such as language learners, teachers, and syllabus designers or materials developers. As the journey of conveying knowledge is the process of moving from known to unknown, the introduction of topics of interest from the learners' sides, or departing from the topics where the language learners might have background knowledge or personal experiences would result in the debilitating act of lowering or minimizing the language learning anxiety index in educational settings. Like any other practical research, the current study also suffered from some limitations. The major limitation of the research conducted was that the subject pool was so limited and the researchers believe that a larger population would result in greater findings. Of course for the enrichment of the study, it also lacked qualitative perspectives. The authors of the present study do believe that providing a qualitative phase to the study would enrich the results and provide depth to the findings of their research. It is strongly suggested that, for future and further investigations, advanced proficiency-level EFL learners with opened-ended qualitative questions could be promoted.

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