

A case study of Chinese college students' self-identity changes in English learning

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Abstract: Despite a series of empirical studies by Gao (2003; 2004; 2007) and her research group, they are devoted to the study of college students' English learning motivation and the change of self-identity. The research mainly focused on the undergraduate and graduate students. However, there are few research on self-identity of junior college students. This research has focused on self-identity, to a certain one of the private college English major students in the qualitative investigation, using 6 kinds of identity change analysis of college English learner's self-identity changes. Through the above correlation analysis, it can be concluded that the research object Jelly's intrinsic interest was more strongly associated with productive, additive change. That is, the stronger the intrinsic interest in English and English culture, the more likely it is that both productive and additive changes in self-identity will occur; and these two changes will in turn stimulate learners' intrinsic interest in English culture.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Lambert (1974), one of the representatives of psychological school, put forward the “social psychological model” [10]. He thinks that second language learning will lead to self - identity change, produce “subtractive bilingualism” or “additive bilingualism”. The former means that the learner's mother tongue and mother tongue cultural identity are replaced by the target language and cultural identity of the target language. The latter means that learners retain their mother tongue and mother tongue cultural identity while acquiring the cultural identity of the target language and target language. Gardner (1985), a famous Canadian scholar, draws on Lambert's theory and believes that language learning not only produces linguistic changes in learners, but also produces non-linguistic changes [5]. It also points out that learning motivation is the most important factor affecting non-linguistic change. The "social education model" is proposed to divide language learning outcomes into two types: language outcomes include language knowledge and skills; Non-language outcomes involve self-identification changes, including the acceptance of new cultural concepts and behavioral patterns. Self-identity refers to an individual's understanding of the self-based on empirical reflection. When people learn a new language, their self-identity will change, and people's

cognition, values and communication styles may change. The self-identity changes of learners due to foreign language learning and contact with different cultures have attracted the attention of many scholars (Domyei, 1998) [2]. Chinese scholar Ren (2008) found that college English learners have dual cultural identities, and the higher their English language level is, the more likely they are to identify with the target language culture [12]. The famous scholar Gao (2001) drew on the concept of “Productive orientation” by the humanistic psychologist Erich Fromm, and on the basis of the survey on “best foreign language learners”, proposed that changes in self-identity would not only lead to Subtractive and Additive, but also produce Productive Bilingualism. It is refer that the mastery of native language and target language, and that native culture and target culture are mutually beneficial. As a result, learners' cognitive, emotional and behavioral abilities are generally improved through active interaction [6]. According to the existing bilingualism theory and combined with the local situation in China, six kinds of self-identification changes of Chinese undergraduates are summarized (Self-Confidence Change, Productive Change, Additive Change, Split Change, Subtractive Change, Zero Change.)

This research has focused on language learning social and psychological two big dimensions: learning motivation and self-identity, to a certain one of the private college English major students in the combination of quantitative and qualitative investigation, using 6 kinds of identity change analysis of college English learners learning motivation and self-identity changes.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite a series of empirical studies by Gao (2003; 2004; 2007) and her research group, they are devoted to the study of college students' English learning motivation and the change of self-identity [8]. However, the research mainly focused on the undergraduate and graduate students, there are few research on English learning motivation and self-identity of junior college students. Therefore, with the convenience of teaching staff, the researcher conducted a case study using qualitative research methods to investigate and study the motivation types and self-identification changes of college students in English learning.

1.3 Purpose Statement

The case study aims to investigate of a 21-year-old English major to learn English and the change of self-identity in learning English. Through this case study and analysis, the researcher can generalize what's the change in self-identity. The research results are helpful for teachers to have a better understanding of students' self-identification changes, so as bettering stimulate, cultivate and maintain students' learning enthusiasm and initiative according to their characteristics and personality, and give play to their learning potential. Based on the results of the study provides some revelations for college English teaching, reasonable teaching suggestions and use them in teaching in order to enhance the effect of college English teaching. And hope that in a certain extent enrich college English research on the change of college students' self-identity.

1.4. Research Questions

This case study aims to address the question: What are the changes in self-identity after learning English?

1.5 Overview of the Case

This study investigates the change of college student Jelly's self-identity in learning English; The

21-year-old student is from a private college in South China's Guangdong Province. The study was a qualitative research, a questionnaire, along with interviews, and students' diaries were used as instruments to conduct the research.

By using a series of scales questionnaires to how their self-identity has changed since learning English. In terms of qualitative research, the researcher took traditional language learning survey methods such as interviews with the subjects and propositional English diaries (Nunan, 2007) [11]. This will lead to an understanding of Jelly's views and attitudes towards the issues under investigation as well as some of the details that the questionnaire does not reveal. An objective analysis of the data will be carried out combining the data and content collected in the three ways in order to outline what changes in self-identity are most evident.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

In order to conduct micro-change research on the individual level, the researcher consulted a colleague, namely a lecturer who taught comprehensive English curriculum in the English major, and selected a representative student with a certain level of English proficiency and learning enthusiasm to participate in this case study in class 1, Junior College English grade 3. After the research object was determined, the researcher asked the student for her own opinion, and she expressed her willingness and active cooperation to participate in the research investigation. All methods that have been chosen to conduct this case study are based on qualitative research for data collection. For instance, Scale questionnaire and personal interviews, as well as traditional language learning survey methods such as written English diary (Nunan, 2007) [11]. These methods are discussed in detail below.

2.2 Questionnaire

In foreign language teaching research, questionnaire is a commonly used data collection method (Dornyei, 2007) [3]. A total of 54 questions were asked in the questionnaire, which ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) with Likert Scale. It includes motivation type and self-identity. The part of motivation follows the classification of English motivation by Referring to Gao, Zhao, Cheng, & Zhou. (2002), which as she said, "We have made five questionnaire predictions in three universities in Beijing, and modified the questions according to the results. The overall reliability of the questionnaire in the actual measurement is 0.84 [7]." And builds on the instrumental and integrative motivation proposed by Gardner & Lambert (1972) [4]. The motivation of Chinese College students can be classified into three categories taking into account the local context: instrumental, situational and cultural; It is further subdivided into intrinsic interest, academic performance, learning situation motivation, going abroad, social responsibility, personal development motivation and information media.

The part of the self-identity, which are divided into six categories: Self-Confidence change, additive bilingualism, subtractive bilingualism, productive bilingualism, split change and zero change. A change in self-confidence is a change in the perception of one's abilities. For example, when I encounter setbacks in English learning, I will doubt my own ability; Every time I overcome the obstacles in English learning, I feel that I have surpassed myself once again. Additive bilingualism - two languages, separated by patterns of behaviour and ideas, applied separately. For example, in addition to my Chinese name, I have an English name, both of which have their own uses. Subtractive bilingualism - The mother tongue and its cultural concepts were replaced by the target language and the culture of the target language. For example, after learning English, I began

to reject some traditional concepts in China. Productive bilingualism refers to the mutual promotion of the understanding of native culture and target culture between mother tongue and target language. For example, with the improvement of my appreciation of English literature and art, I became more and more interested in Chinese literature and art. Split change- Mother tongue and target language, mother tongue culture and target language cultural concepts struggle with each other, resulting in identity fragmentation. For example, when I go back and forth between English and Chinese modes of behavior, it is as if I am painfully torn in two. Zero change - no change in self-identity. For example, it is boring to talk about the changes after learning English, these questions are meaningless to me. For the above 6 categories, zero change is the reference item. The change of self-confidence is independent of the change of cultural identity, while the others belong to cultural identity.

In accordance with the questionnaire and scoring criteria of Gao's Research Group (2004), which consisted of four questions for each self-identity change category, 5 points for each, full score is 20 points, and the critical value to distinguish change from unchanged is 12 points (representing uncertainty) [9].

2.3 Student's Diaries

The student learning diary was set by the writing instructor, and students are encouraged to exercise their English thinking in the form of diary as much as possible. Students can volunteer to write for any length, regardless of grade, and have no time to ask when the task will be completed. The researcher collected Jelly's learning diary twice. The topics are "What's your opinion of the universal rush to learn English" and "Has English become a part of your life to some extent". The reason for collecting Jelly's study diary is to get a closer look at her perspectives and understand how her self-identity has changed based on the language she uses.

2.4 Interview

The researchers conducted a 45-minute taped face-to-face interview with Jelly. To avoid Jelly feeling overwhelmed, the interview is set in a time and place chosen by Jelly. Three days before the interview, confirm the place and time and get Jelly's permission to record the interview. There are various types of interviews, such as standardized interviews, semi-standardized interviews, and non-standardized interviews. However, for this case study, a semi-structured interview was chosen.

Semi-standardized interview is a more flexible method in the interview process. It enables the researcher to conduct a series of questions with relatively simple structure and also to explore the spontaneous question raised by interviewees (Coughlan, 2009) [1]. Therefore, most interview questions are prepared before the interview, while some are based on the interview situation. The prepared questions aim to delve into Jelly's emotional attitudes and detailed descriptions that questionnaires and student diaries can't capture.

The reason for choosing a semi-standard interview is that it gives interviewees a chance to tell their own stories, rather than answer a series of structured questions. As a result, it increases the spontaneity of the researcher to explore some aspects related to case studies in greater depth. After the interview was completed, the researcher converted the interview audio recordings into text along with notes taken during the interview to obtain a complete interview text of approximately 6700 words; Jerry's responses were transcribed and marked up.

3. Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter includes analysis and discussion of the collected data, which will be supported by relevant theories and literature. Through analysis and discussion to analyze the changes of the identity of the English learning.

3.2 What are the changes in self-identity after learning English?

The result of Jelly's questionnaire shows three changes above the critical value: 18 for Confidence change, 20 for Productive change and 20 for Additive change; Zero change is 11 points close to the critical value; both the Split change and Subtractive Change were significantly below the critical value, which were 5 points and 4 points respectively.

In addition, in the interview, when the researcher asked about the change in values after learning English, Jelly's was very positive that is after learning English because she learned more information about various aspects of the world, but instead made her love her own country more and identify more with her own country's culture and language. This shows that Jelly's understanding of the culture of her mother tongue and the culture of English formed a mutually reinforcing process, and after learning English, she found that she loved her country and culture more. Jelly also talked about the negative effects of learning English, "Because the order of Chinese language is different from the order of English language, sometimes there is a mixture of Chinese and English. But I'm not saying that my Chinese has regressed, it's just that my English thinking has affected me a little bit when I speak Chinese. But not so much that I can't even write Chinese anymore, and I can't even use idioms". It can be seen that Jelly also had a Self-identity Change in Subtractive bilingualism, but this is a very low level, which is consistent with the results of the questionnaire.

4. Conclusion

Through the above correlation analysis, it can be concluded that there are some differences between the results of this study and Gao's (2004) conclusions about self-identity changes [9]. Different from Gao's (2004) conclusion, the change of confidence type is the largest (mean value 14.21), followed by zero (mean value 13.39) [9]. The largest changes in this study were the productive and additive, both of which are full score of 20, and the confidence change is the second (18 score); while the split (5score) and Subtractive (4 score) were both below the critical value, which is consistent with the findings of Gao (2004) in a study of undergraduates, but the difference was that the score value was greatly different [9]. At the same time, the researcher found that Jelly's intrinsic interest was more strongly associated with productive, additive change. That is, the stronger the intrinsic interest in English and English culture, the more likely it is that both productive and additive changes in self-identity will occur; and these two changes will in turn stimulate learners' intrinsic interest in English culture.

Therefore, in the context of foreign language teaching in China, teachers should pay special attention to the change of self-identity, a non-linguistic outcomes, while paying attention to linguistic outcomes and trying to help students improve their English skills.

4.1 Limitation

Self-identity in English learning are very complex. This study is only an exploratory case study

in order to summarize the changes of self-identity of the object of this case study. The limitation was that the sample size involved was too small, with only one student in question, a 21-year-old female college English major. Therefore, the study cannot be generalized or applied to other contexts, and the data obtained may not be generalizable to other students, such as undergraduate or graduate students. Please be aware of the subject matter as you read this study. Since each student's Motivation for English learning is different, more subjects can be selected to carry out a longer period of investigation and research in the follow-up study, so as improving the explanatory power of the research results, and to analyze the relevant studies on English learning motivation and self-identity of college English majors in a more comprehensive and in-depth way. These limitations make the research in this field need to be strengthened and improved, which also points out the direction for the future research in this field.

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