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The Enlightenment of Affective Filter Hypothesis and Risk-Taking on English Learning

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Abstract

Affective filter hypothesis reveals that learners with different emotional learning attitudes have different filter capability for language learning input. Learners with positive emotional attitude have a low filter of language learning input, while learners with negative emotional attitudes have a high filter of language learning input. Risk-taking means that the learner dares to take risks. He is not afraid of making mistakes and the unknown situation. The risk taker will seize every opportunity to use learned knowledge into practice, which is a positive emotional attitude. In the meantime, the adventurous students' affective filter is relatively low.

In actual classroom, teachers usually pay little attention to the emotional state of students, and teachers rarely realize the impact of motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and risk taking on students' English learning. More attention is still paid to the training of students' basic skills. Therefore, this paper first explains the connotation of the affective filter hypothesis and risk-taking. After analyzing and explaining the actual teaching situation and the current situation of students, four suggestions are put forward from the perspectives of teachers and students. Among them, the first three suggestions are for teachers, and the last one is for students. The first suggestion is about teaching methods. Teachers should get rid of the obstacles of traditional teaching methods, use multimedia and other technology to assist teaching and give students more opportunities to speak in class. The second suggestion is about teaching atmosphere. Creating a relaxation and pleasant classroom environment is conducive to reducing students' anxiety and good for students to take risks. The third suggestion is about self-confidence. In order to

build students' confidence in English learning, teachers should encourage students, discover the highlights of each student and praise students when they make progress. The fourth suggestion is about the significance of affective factors. Students should recognize the role of emotional factors in English learning and adopt effective methods to self-regulate.

Key words: Affective filter hypothesis; Risk-taking; English teaching; Enlightenment

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INTRODUCTION

Affective factors play a crucial role in the language learning process of students, yet most teachers do not have a deep understanding or application of affective factors that affect students' learning. Affective filter hypothesis refers to the ability of learners to filter the language input knowledge. Different degrees of filter capacity will bring various language inputs and results. The spirit of taking risks is the tendency of language learners to participate in uncertain or unknown things and situations. It is acknowledged that students with lower emotional filter and higher risk-taking will perform better in language learning. In the meantime, the two theories have a closely correlation with each other. Generally speaking, students with higher risk-taking spirit maintain lower emotional filter capacity than students with lower risk-taking spirit, and these students are more likely to get succeed in language learning. Consequently, in order to enable teachers to get a better comprehension of the significance of affective elements to students' language learning as well as the role these elements play in teaching, this paper is on the basis of the

affective filter hypothesis and the risk-taking spirit and demonstrates the related research of these two theories. At the same time, it is essential to get a further analysis of the relation between the affective filter hypothesis, the spirit of taking risks and English learning by combining them with the actual teaching situations. Finally, four suggestions are put forward from the perspective of teachers and students. It is hoped that these advices are able to help English teachers get a better understanding of the role that emotional factors play in teaching, provide some helpful methods for teachers to better apply these two theories for future teaching and make students to improve their learning efficiency through some affective elements.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part will firstly introduce the definition of the two theories, then related study about affective filter hypothesis and risk-taking in language learning at home and abroad will also be presented.

1.1 The Definition of the Two Theories

1.1.1 The Definition of Affective Filter Hypothesis

The concept of affective filter was firstly proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977). They hold the view that affective filter is actually an inherent processing system of foreign language learners, which subconsciously influences their foreign language acquisition and absorption through emotional factors. In fact, the affective filter reveals the relation between the SLA and affective factors. Based on this concept, Krashen gave a further development of affective filter and put forward affective filter hypothesis.

According to Krashen (1985), affective filter is a psychological barrier that prevents language learners from fully absorbing the comprehensible input that they obtain. Thus, before learners acquire and absorb the comprehensible knowledge, they must firstly go through the affective filter. At the same time, there existing many emotional factors that related to the filter capacity, such as motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and so on. That means affective factors play a crucial role in filtering language input and the affective filter capacity of different learners is also different.

Generally speaking, learners who have a positive attitude toward SLA can pass through the filter, which means they can absorb more knowledge and at a low filter. While for learner with a negative attitude towards SLA, they are prone to absorb less knowledge and at a high filter. Thus, during the teaching process, teachers should not only pay attention to the learning skills and knowledge of students, but also need to pay attention to students' affective attitudes and try their best to make students hold a positive attitude towards English learning.

1.1.2 The Definition of Risk-taking

According to Beebe's (1983) definition, risk-taking means individuals must choose from different possibilities and the result of which is uncertain. Therefore, risk-taking just like gambler. The result of it is unknow, maybe you will success or not.

Ely (1986) points the relation between risk-taking and language leaning, and defines risk-taking as personal tendency to take risks when using foreign languages. Ellis (1994) claims that students who are willing to take risks are less hesitant, rarely write a draft before speaking, prefer to use complex language structures and are more tolerant of errors. From Dai Manchun's (2000) perspective, risk-taking in language learning means that the learner speaks less frequently during the learning process and is willing to use complex structures, and can tolerate ambiguity and errors in language phenomena. Furthermore, Wang Yang (2015) concludes the traits of a risk taker:

- (1) Still willing to accept challenging tasks when conditions are not certain that they will succeed;
- (2) Choose tasks that involve some reasonable risk rather than and excessive risk;
- (3) Willing to share and approve of ideas that they believe in but are not well accepted by others;
- (4) Willing to evaluate their work or ideas through a critical evaluation method, and be willing to correct their ideas when successfully challenged;
- (5) Willing to be incorrect and accept risky tasks bravely that may end in failure.

In a word, students who are risk takers will seize every opportunity to use the language they have learnt to express themselves. They are brave enough to accept the consequence and not afraid of losing face. As a matter of fact, risk-taking benefits students a lot during the process of learning a foreign language. And teachers should encourage students to take risks in order to master the language better.

1.2 Researches of Affective Filter Hypothesis in Language Learning

1.2.1 Related Research at Home

Once the affective filter hypothesis was proposed, it caused a sensation in the field of second language research in the world and opened up a new horizon for second language researchers.

In the 1980s, related research on affective factors in SLA began in China. From 1987 to 1991, in order to verify the various factors affecting English learning, Beijing Foreign Studies University randomly selected 250 English major students from 6 foreign language universities to conduct a research study. This study involved 13 factors and 18 variables which included emotional factors. And related study on affective filter hypothesis is conducted in the areas of English reading, writing, etc.

So as to better understand the writing emotions of middle school students and put forward some suggestions and methods to solve students' problems based on the degree of affective impact on writing, Li Ping (2017) makes a questionnaire for 306 junior high school students to investigate the current situation of affective factors, such as confidence, anxiety and motivation, in English writing process of junior high school students. After analyzing the data, she finds that only a few students are confident in English writing, most students are more anxious about English writing and maintain high motivation of English writing. Furthermore, she reckons that during the process of teaching students some writing methods and writing strategies, the cultivation of students' positive writing emotions should also be stressed. Cause only under the low filtering of positive emotions, high absorption results such as writing language knowledge and methods can occur, which enables our writing teaching work be more effective.

To explore the application of affective filter hypothesis in English reading teaching in high school. Jia Lei and Li Yingtao (2019) delve into current status and problems of English reading teaching in high school. They point out that in high school reading classes, teachers often ignore students' emotional factors. On the one hand, most teachers only pay attention to a few excellent students and ignore the students with learning difficulties, leading to increasing anxiety and inferiority of these students because of poor academic performance. Jia Lei and Li Yingtao also make a conclusion that affective filter hypothesis has a positive effect on solving high school English reading problems and is suitable for high school English reading teaching, so it is essential for English teachers to apply the affective filter hypothesis into reading class.

1.2.2 Related Research at Abroad

Affective filter hypothesis is one of the five SLA hypotheses proposed by Krashen. It attaches great importance in emotional factors, such as motivation, confidence and anxiety.

Based on the comprehension of the affective filter hypothesis, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) did a research through questionnaire survey, classroom teaching and observation, and found that language learners' different motivations, genders, cultural backgrounds, ages, learning tasks, and stages of language learning will affect the result of language learning. They concluded that motivation for language learning was an important criterion to evaluating the language learning performance.

Rosber (1999) investigated the relationship between local high school students' self-confidence in English reading and reading performance by using questionnaires, classroom English tests, and other methods. The result proves that the higher the confidence you have, the higher the English reading performance you get.

In order to explore the anxiety of students in language learning and its causes in the context of advanced language, Ewald (2007) applied a qualitative analysis to conduct a questionnaire survey of 21 advanced Spanish students from the same university. To his surprise, he found that many students felt anxiety in the classroom. What's more, these students highlighted the vital role the teacher could play in generating and reducing anxiety, which gives a great inspiration for teachers to regulate students' anxiety during class.

For investigating the students' emotional characteristics of the English course, attitudes and thoughts on it, Nerguz Bulut Serin, Oğuz Serin & Ali Ceylan (2010) carried out the study based on the motivation of the English learning of the affective filter hypothesis, and selected 228 students from a certain university foreign language school preparatory class as the participants of the research. After analyzing the data collected, they consider that students' attitudes towards English learning are not affected by gender, high school type, social economic standard. As a matter of fact, their attitudes are significantly affected by teachers and high school performance.

1.3 Researches of Risk-Taking in Language Learning

1.3.1 Related Research at Home

The related study about risk-taking is not mature in China and the research of risk-taking began in recent 10 years.

For exploring how Chinese students view risk-taking in English learning as well as the relationship between risk-taking and English performance, Wang Ling (2007) applied quantitative and qualitative methods to made an investigation of 58 English major students' current risk-taking spirit in a certain key university and interviewed 6 students. She found out that most students had realized that the risk-taking was beneficial to English learning to some extent, but their behaviors and concepts were not completely consistent. What's more, within the middle level of risk-taking, risk-taking was positively correlated with English level.

Zou Yanmin (2011) did a research of the correlation between risk-taking and oral English communicative competence from the perspective of fluency and accuracy. Zou used risk-taking scales, oral English communication tests, and interviews to study 30 sophomore English students from the same class. From the result of analyzing, she further maintained that risk-taking truly influenced students' oral English communicative competence and it indeed related to the fluency and accuracy of spoken English. Additionally, she proposed some advices to English teachers. For example, supporting students to use more newly learned words and expressions and so on.

Wang Yang (2015) further carried out a study of the connection between risk-taking and the accuracy, fluency and complexity of oral English production. She made

an investigation of 35 English major junior students from three different classes by questionnaire and an oral English test. Through making an analysis of the data collected, she perceived that there was a strong and positive relation between risk-taking spirit and the fluency and accuracy of oral English output, which suggests that students who are prone to take risks are more likely to produce sentences more fluently and accurately. Some recommendations were suggested by Wang Yang to English major students, such as realizing the importance of taking risks in oral English, not being scared of making mistakes and strengthening cooperation with other students.

1.3.2 Related Research at Abroad

Scholars abroad have done a lot research related to risk-taking for many years. Thus, their studies are more mature.

To discover the connection between class risk-taking and voluntary classroom activities, Ely (1986) investigated the situation of six classes college students in two levels who learned Spanish, and found that the risk-taking situation of students was directly proportional to the number of times they took part in classroom activities. Ely(1986) advised teachers to design and test the relative effectiveness of various language classroom strategies; as students became feel safer, teachers were able to encourage them to be a more positive role in the classroom. What's more, he also provided evidence for risk-taking in four aspects.

Bang (1999) conducted a study of the relationship between risk-taking behavior and spoken language in a Korean context. Through a qualitative study of 15 freshmen with various majors in a Korean university, he claimed that the all participants were aware of the significance of risk-taking behaviors to classroom oral skills and the correlation between successful language learning and risk-taking behaviors during the learning process was very large.

So as to find out the role of risk-taking in intellectual development, Newmann (1996) and Newmann et al (2001) did a research of it. They reckoned that students should be in an environment they considered safe to discuss, share, and learn new knowledge for undertaking the risks that brought in intellectual advancement. Additionally, they advocated that in a certain environment, taking risks was beneficial to developing intelligence. As a result, it is crucial to create a good environment for students to learn languages.

2. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO THEORIES AND ENGLISH LEARNING

This chapter presents the relation between affective filter hypothesis and Risk-taking. Also, the connection between the two theories and English learning will be

demonstrated. In the process of analyzing the relationship, the author will combine some teaching experiences into it.

2.1 The Relation Between Affective Filter Hypothesis and Risk-Taking

Affective filter hypothesis emphasizes the emotional factors in SLA. It tells us emotion will influence learning. And researchers have conducted a lot of study in the aspects of attitude, motivation, anxiety and self-confidence for many years. It is generally believed that the higher the affective filter, the greater the obstacle to language input will be. Moreover, for learners, stronger affective filter will bring worse language learning effect.

Risk-taking is positive affective filter because risk takers always catch opportunities to use language they have learnt. They are with high motivation, self-confidence, and a low level of anxiety. Thus, the filter capacity of those learners is low, which signifies that they will filter less input knowledge and obtain more comprehensible knowledge to store in brains. Furthermore, risk takers are prone to be successful in SLA. As for people who are unwilling to take risks, they have negative affective filter. Because they are anxious, hesitate, lack of confidence, making them filtering more comprehensible knowledge, so their affective filter capacity is high and only acquire less knowledge to the brains during the process of learning a foreign language.

In sum, risk takers have low affective filter. Under the same conditions, more language input can be obtained by these learners, so these inputs can reach the language acquisition device and be internalized into the learner's own knowledge.

2.2 Affective Filter Hypothesis and English Learning

2.2.1 Motivation

Harmer (1991) defines motivation as an inner drive, which can stimulate individuals to chase their goals. It indicates that if people obtain the internal motivation, they will try their best to pursue and achieve it. Moreover, in the aspect of SLA, Ellis (1985) believed that motivation plays a significant role in the SLA process, which tells us students' motivation influence their language acquisition. Many scholars have studied the relation between motivation and English learning or performances. According to an affective state investigation of 120 high school students made by Wang Zhen (2018), it reveals that students with strong motivation are prone to get higher scores in English.

However, one kind of situation can't be ignored. For students, they are lack of the most primitive motivation in English learning. Thus, students always accept English more mechanically, and regard English as a subject that needed for the college entrance examination. In fact, motivation factors can be divided into multiple dimensions, while the most common one is the internal

and external motivation. Most students learn English for further study, peers' or teachers' praise, which can be considered as the external motivation. While students who are interested in learning English are those with internal motivation. It is acknowledged that learning English is a long-term period, students with internal and high motivation are more likely to get success.

2.2.2 Self-Confidence

Literally, self-confidence refers to believing that you have the ability to do something well. It is a kind of positive emotional attitude. Krashen (1982) maintains that the personality of learners is related to the effectiveness of English learning. Among all personality factors, self-confidence is the most important. Also, it is proved that students with high confidence can get higher learning efficiency and better result.

While in most cases, students are lack of confidence. Once the teacher asks a question, students in the whole class remain silent. Such kind of situation is very common in daily teaching, and the reason is that students are not dare to make mistakes since they are at a low level of confidence and strong self-esteem. They feel shameful when making mistakes in front of the whole class, so most of them choose to be quiet and say nothing. However, students who are willing to make mistakes can acquire more opportunities to speak English and use what they've learnt into practice. These students can even accept bad results when facing the unknown situations. Therefore, this type of students can get more exercises in the process of English learning to improve their language level. In addition, teachers often point out students' mistakes directly and seldom tell students that making mistakes isn't a terrible thing, which does harm to students' initiative and confidence.

2.2.3 Anxiety

Anxiety is a kind of negative psychological state, which refers to a sense of threat that an individual fails to achieve his goal or cannot overcome the immediate difficulties. While the anxiety in language learning manifests like worrying about mistakes, retreating from difficulties, and avoiding problems during the language learning process. And it has been testified by Gardner (1981) that the anxiety is inversely proportional to the quantity and quality of language acquisition. And holding a moderate anxiety is the best state of SLA.

Moreover, anxiety is one of the most common emotional factors of students. Student at different stages may suffer from various pressure and trouble, which mainly come from study, parents or teachers. Also, there are many tests in students' daily learning. Once the students get bad results, they will become anxious and even doubt themselves. Such situation is one of the major reasons to enhancing students' anxiety. Furthermore, teachers rarely pay attention to guiding students how to regulate anxiety during the teaching process. Thus,

sometimes students don't realize that they are over anxiety and long-term anxiety will affect students' English learning and mental health. Teachers should provide guidance to help students ease their anxiety during the learning process and enable students to find their own pace of learning, maintaining a positive attitude to face pressure and difficulties.

2.3 Risk-Taking and English Learning

Risk-taking refers to do something challenging and not be afraid of making mistakes. During the process of learning English, students who are prone to be risk takers will seize every chance to use English. Those students are more confident and their affective filter level is very low. So, these students are able to acquire more comprehensible knowledge and master the target language better.

In real class, there are few risk takers. Most of the students choose to do the things that they are sure enough to complete them perfectly rather than do something uncertain.

This is a Chinese traditional concept that not only affect students, but also teachers. Because some teachers do not like students to take risks, they like students to do things with certainty. What's more, teachers are not aware of the significance of risk-taking during the process of learning English, and they rarely develop students' risk-taking awareness. In reality, many researches have revealed that a successful second language learner must be an adventurous person. Consequently, risk-taking brings many benefits in the process of learning English and teachers should encourage students to be a risk taker.

All in all, during the process of English learning, the two theories can work together to improve the learning efficiency of students. Affective filter hypothesis can be applied to increasing students' willingness of taking risks. With the help of affective filter hypothesis, we can reduce the affective obstacles impeding learners, and let students seize appropriate opportunities to take risks. Once students psychologically regard taking risks and making mistakes as a normal thing during the process of language learning, the effect of emotional filter will not be so great. At the same time, risk takers are those with high motivation, confidence and moderate anxiety, they are more likely to be successful in SLA.

3. SOME SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

As we all known, teaching is an activity consisting of teachers' teaching and students' learning, both of which are indispensable. Based on the affective filter hypothesis and risk-taking, this part gives some advice to teachers and students for enhancing teaching and learning efficiency.

3.1 About Teaching Methods

Most teachers apply traditional teaching methods to teach English, making students feel boring or dull during the process of learning. Also, long-term traditional teaching way is not conducive to improving student motivation. In addition, we often emphasize the importance of student-centered. But in most cases, teacher domain the whole class and only remain a few chances for students to speak. Therefore, it is very crucial for teachers to change their way by following two aspects.

Use more creative ways to teach English. Traditional ways are not suitable for current teaching, so teachers should apply some multi-media equipment to play English songs, video clips, etc. to teach in a vivid method. And in the first five minutes of each lesson, each student can in turns to display English speeches, English poetry, English songs, etc. on the platform. They can choose what they like to display in English. Through this way, students are easier to find their points of interests in English. Once they are interested in English, they will have the motivation to study. Because motivation and interest are closely related. If a student with high motivation, his affective filter will be low.

Give students more opportunities. In class, teachers should not play a monologue. Students are encouraged to take part in class while teachers need to design some activities to let students join in and open their mouth to speak English. Input knowledge is needed for students, but output is more important. It is necessary for students to use what they have learnt in practice. Once students get the opportunity to speak, they also get the chance to take risks.

3.2 About Atmosphere of Classroom

The atmosphere of classroom closely relates the degree of students' anxiety. Generally speaking, an intensive class may make students feel uncomfortable and anxious, while a relaxing atmosphere brings students many benefits. However, it is hard to see a relaxing classroom atmosphere in reality because teachers always domain the whole class. We know high level of anxiety will improve the affective filter level, which is bad for students to absorb the comprehensible knowledge. Consequently, teachers should try their best to create a relaxing classroom atmosphere for students.

In the first place, building an equal relation between teachers and students is vital. Teachers should treat every student equally, no matter how excellent or poor the student is. If teachers only pay attention to those outstanding students and neglect students with poor grades, then the students with best grades will be egotistical while the students with poor grades will be discouraged or even lose confidence in learning English. But if students feel that they are treated equally by their teachers, they will respect teachers and the whole class will get a good learning atmosphere. Besides, teachers can provide some group work, role-play activities to students.

During the process, students can help each other and get a chance to use the knowledge.

All in all, in a relaxing classroom atmosphere, students will be less anxious and willing to take risks. Thus, their affective filter is low and they can absorb more knowledge.

3.3 About Self-Confidence of Students

Self-confident students, as is known, dare to take risks. They are not afraid to make mistakes and do not feel embarrassed when making mistakes. However, in the same language learning environment, weak self-confident students often pay more attention to correctness. They are shy and unwilling to participate or express themselves in group activities because of the fear of mistakes. Consequently, these students lose many opportunities for language practice, which will adversely affect English learning.

During the process of learning English, most students are lack of confidence for various reasons. However, besides students themselves, teachers have an indispensable responsibility for this situation. To begin with, some teachers point out students' mistakes in a direct way, which does harm to students' self-esteem and confidence, making students not dare to speak in class and choosing to keep silence. Secondly, teachers seldom tell students not be afraid of making mistakes because everyone is inevitably making mistakes in his life. Hence, students often regard making mistakes as a shameful thing. Once they make a mistake, they will doubt their capacity rather than find the reasons or learn something from such mistakes. Teachers should change the ways in order to build students' confidence.

During the class, teachers do not have to point out students' mistakes directly. They can use more gentle way or guide students to find mistakes by themselves. Because it is more meaningful to correct mistakes by students themselves instead of teachers. Moreover, teachers should discover and praise students timely when they make progress in English learning, especially for students who are lack of confidence, which is a very effective method in enhancing students' confidence. Meanwhile, teachers need to be patient enough to tolerant students' silence in class and encourage them to express themselves. It is significant to enable students know that mistakes are not terrible and what they need to do is facing them bravely.

3.4 About Significance of Affective Factors

In the light of affective filter hypothesis and risk taking, motivation, confidence, anxiety and risk-taking have an impact on students' learning efficiency. However, students are too young to control and manage their emotion. They even do not know the significance of emotional factors since they put much attention to their leaning skills and knowledge. Besides teachers' guidance and help, students are supposed to achieve something by themselves.

Students are required to find the motivation of learning English especially the inner motivation. They should not only regard English as a subject to learn, but also a kind of interesting foreign language to learn. What's more, it is vital for students to build their confidence. Students need to recognize that everyone is a unique individual that he possesses his own shining points, so students should never lose faith that they can master English well. As for anxiety, students should be conscious of the significance of cooperating with classmates, which benefits reducing anxiety. That means students are able to be divided into groups with the guidance of teachers. Through group work, students will not be so nervous and can learn something from peers. In group work, students get more opportunities to use English and shy students might not feel too much pressure in class. At the same time, students are easier to be affected by those adventure peers and eventually become dare to speak.

When it comes to risk-taking, students should be conscious of the significance of being a risk taker. In most cases, being afraid of making mistakes is the biggest problem for students to be a risk taker, they only want to show the perfect aspects to people rather than their shortcomings. Consequently, it is critical for students to know making mistakes is not a disaster. It can remind you of knowledge blind spots. What you should do is correcting the mistakes instead of escaping from them.

CONCLUSION

In effect, affective filter hypothesis and risk-taking both emphasize the importance of emotional factors in the process of learning a foreign language. For learners, motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, adventure, etc. will affect the effectiveness of their language learning since people are emotional animals. Consequently, in order to improve learning efficiency of students, teachers should master and apply these two theories well in the process of teaching. Teachers should change their teaching methods, create a relaxing classroom atmosphere, and build up students' self-confidence through encouragement. Moreover, it is necessary for teachers to tell students the significance of taking risks and to find the merits of every student.

In a word, affective filter hypothesis and risk-taking truly give a big inspiration to English teaching and learning from emotional perspective. Teachers should try their best to help students keep a low affective filter and be a risk taker, enabling students to actively explore and develop themselves in the process of learning English.

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