

# The Essential Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Speaking Skills: A Case Study of an EFL Speaker's Speech Proficiency

Yuhong Peng

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College, Center for University English Teacher Development Studies, Guangzhou 510545, China

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**Abstract:** The current study aims to investigate the essential factors affecting EFL learners' speaking skills by analyzing an advanced Chinese EFL speaker's speech proficiency. Drawing upon data from structured interviews and other data collection methods (e.g., the FLE questionnaire and the LAMMA aptitude test), the study summarizes the external and internal factors of the participant's speech proficiency development. The findings of the study suggest that the amount of high-quality input, learners' emotions and motivation, and interaction play a significant role in EFL learners' speech development.

**Keywords:** Speech Proficiency, English Learning, External and Internal Factors.

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## 1. Introduction

In a globalized world with many non-native English speakers, the Global Englishes paradigm has been developed, and learning English as a second language has become necessary for many people around the world. In terms of pronunciation, many researchers have emphasized the importance of "intelligibility" and "comprehensibility" of EFL learners (i.e., to be able to "successfully deliver a message") (Rose & Galloway, 2019, p. 39). Therefore, it is crucial to deep dive into the factors affecting EFL learners' pronunciation proficiency development.

This study focuses on the speech proficiency of a Chinese EFL learner who is referred to as Li Dong. He is a 22-year-old male postgraduate studying strategic communications at a famous university in London. Based on the structured interview with Li and his self-assessment, as well as other data collection methods (e.g., the MALQ questionnaire and the LAMMA aptitude test), this paper analyzes his L2 speech proficiency, language learning background, the relevant personal characteristics and aptitudes, and identifies the essential factors affecting his L2 learning. Lastly, this paper puts forward some practical suggestions for many beginner-to-intermediate L2 learners to acquire a target language efficiently and effectively according to Li's learning experience.

## 2. Assessment of the Participant's Proficiency

To explore Li's language learning in depth, it is essential to identify his current level of speech proficiency. The IELTS test that Li took about one year ago could be an important reference, in which he got an overall score of 8, with listening at 8.5 and speaking at 6.5. This may indicate that he is a proficient user of English according to the CEFR scale with relatively low-level speech proficiency (IELTS, 2025).

Since the test was taken one year ago before Li came abroad, he was asked to complete several tests to determine his current English level. Firstly, according to the self-assessment grid (SAG) of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which is a useful tool for learners to

understand their abilities (Council of Europe, 2001; Glover, 2011), Li Dong rated himself at C1 level for his listening skills. This indicates that he can "understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and not explicit" and can "understand television programmes and films without too much effort" (p. 26). His self-assessment for spoken production was also C1, indicating that he "can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion" (p. 26). In terms of spoken interaction, he matched his ability with the statements of B2: "I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views" (p. 26). The reason why he did not choose the C1 level is that sometimes he would pause to search for appropriate expressions, obviously during speaking.

In addition to self-assessment, Li took other online tests to verify his English level. The vocabulary test indicated that Li grasped at least 10,300 word families (<https://my.vocabularysize.com/>). According to Adolphs & Schmitt's (2003) and Nation's (2006) studies, a vocabulary size of 6–7,000 word families is a necessity to reach 98 percent coverage of an aural passage. Therefore, Li Dong is likely to understand at least 98% of the lexical items used in daily conversations (Webb & Rodger, 2008). Moreover, Li got an overall score of 90 on the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), suggesting that he could use bottom-up and top-down approaches flexibly and has mastered a range of listening strategies such as problem-solving, planning and evaluation, and directed attention (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal & Tafaghodtari, 2017). All these may suggest that Li has an advanced comprehension of L2 discourse during interaction (VanZeeland & Schmitt, 2013).

Li Dong also took an online test on Speak & Improve (<https://speakandimprove.com/>), a research project developed by Cambridge English, since machine-based automated assessments of L2 comprehensibility have been proved useful and reliable by many researchers (Derwing et al., 2018; Saito, Macmillan, Kachlicka, Kunihara & Minematsu, 2023). The

test has five parts, including simple questions, reading sentences, impromptu speaking, etc. After the test, the robot uses statistical analysis of a large number of features extracted from the participant's speech, comparing them against a large corpus of speech from other EFL students to judge his level of proficiency (Cambridge English, 2025). The test result for Li was B2, which is consistent with his previous IELTS test score.

To check Li's speaking skills in detail, his recording on Speak & Improve was listened to and analyzed carefully in several aspects by the researcher. Firstly, although Li's pronunciation could not be regarded as "nativelike", his use of segmentals, word stress, and prosody was highly comprehensible and "comfortably intelligible", which is a more realistic goal than targeting a native-like pronunciation for second language learners (Kenworthy, 1990; Derwing & Munro, 2009, 2015; Levis, 2018; Rose & Galloway, 2019; Saito, et al., 2019). For instance, Li's intonation was flat with some improper intonations, which may be influenced by negative L1 transfer, since every Chinese tone has its own distinct and established pitch contour (So & Best, 2010), but the pitch and intonation in English vary depending on context. Nevertheless, this did not undermine the comprehensibility and intelligibility of his speech. Moreover, most of his errors were low functional load errors, such as pronouncing the /l/ sound with a nasal, which would not cause too much difficulty in comprehending his speech compared to high functional load errors (Brown, 1991; Munro & Derwing, 2006).

Secondly, Li Dong could express his ideas fluently and spontaneously at a normal speed with only a few breakdowns. When speaking, he used both unfilled pauses and filled pauses, such as ah, oh, eh, to search for good expressions. As for repair strategies, there were almost no obvious self-corrections or repetitions in his answer, which may indicate his high level of utterance fluency (Suzuki & Kormos, 2019).

Furthermore, Li Dong exhibited a relatively good command of grammar, as he could organize whole comprehensible sentences and use a wide range of grammatical structures, such as the attributive clause and adverbial clause. Although he made some grammatical errors, including subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, and plurals (e.g., "University students do part-time jobs has always been a topic of controversy."), these errors did not block effective communication and understanding of his speech.

Regarding the lexical resources, Li Dong used a variety of words to express his opinions, while he repeated the adjective 'important' and the verb 'think' several times. In addition to frequent words, he could also use some less frequent words in his speech, such as 'two-fold', 'divert', and 'consistency', indicating the breadth of his vocabulary. Moreover, there were several low-frequency and high-quality collocations in his answer (e.g., 'embrace diversity', 'divert people's attention from', 'hang out', 'relieve the financial stress'), which had a positive influence on his L2 oral proficiency (Kyle & Crossley, 2015; Saito, 2020).

Based on all the test results and analysis, Li's speaking ability may stand on the borderline between B2 and C1 according to the CEFR level (i.e., generally independent-to-proficient). In other words, his pronunciation is highly comprehensible, and he could be considered a successful L2 learner and a proficient L2 speaker from the perspective of comprehensible and intelligible L2 oral proficiency (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Levis, 2005, 2018).

### 3. A Description of the Participant's L2 Learning History and the Linguistic Environment

As for Li's learning history, he began to study English at the age of nine since English was a mandatory course for grade-three primary school students, which was a requirement by the Ministry of Education of China (Ministry of Education, 2001). Li's age of L2 acquisition may influence his ultimate attainment, especially his pronunciation, according to the Critical Period Hypothesis, which suggests that there is a difference between adult and child L2 learners (DeKeyser & Larson-Hall, 2005). As for the specific critical age of onset, many researchers claim that (Asher & Garcia, 1969; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2009) child learners who started learning English at an average age of 7.6 years tend to speak L2 with a foreign accent. Therefore, it may be impossible for Li to get a native-like pronunciation.

In terms of the learning context, Li's L2 learning mainly happened in classroom settings before he came to London. In other words, he learned English in a relatively formal and explicit way. Under huge examination pressure in China, most of his English teachers followed a traditional teaching method by focusing on examination skills and explicit grammar learning rather than speaking skills and real language use (Hu, 2002; Xiang, Stillwell, Burns & Heppenstall, 2020). According to Norris and Ortega's (2000) and Akakura's (2012) studies, explicit and formal grammar instruction is an efficient way of learning, especially for ESL learners with L1 that is typologically distinct from English, such as Chinese and Japanese. Therefore, this period of learning experience may be conducive to Li Dong's L2 grammar acquisition and spontaneous use of both complicated and simple L2 forms (Spada & Tomita, 2010). Nevertheless, these kinds of teacher-centered classes did not offer too much time for students to interact with each other and have authentic conversations with native speakers to experience the 'negotiation for meaning' process, which is regarded as an essential source for L2 speech learning and may influence Li's speaking proficiency improvement (Long, 1996, 2009).

Regarding the learning time, although there were only fifty minutes of class time per day on average, Li Dong spent a lot of time on L2 learning after class. Furthermore, with the development of technology, he got access to many high-quality English videos and texts all over the world online, which were authentic learning materials such as the TED Talk, facilitating his L2 learning, especially incidental vocabulary acquisition (Brown, Waring & Donkaewbua, 2008; Coxhead & Walls, 2012). Nevertheless, he still did not have opportunities to produce L2 oral output and interact with others using L2. This situation continued when he went to university. Although his undergraduate major was English Literature, Li still relied on extensive input to learn English. With more learning experience, Li was more selective about the materials and exposed himself to native speakers' pronunciation, which may be conducive for him to achieve high-level L2 speech performance according to Flege's (2021) SLM-r model.

After graduation, Li Dong moved to London at the age of twenty-one for his postgraduate studies. This one-year experience of studying abroad offered him a naturalistic environment to improve his L2 performance and gain development in his oral proficiency (Carroll, 1967; Lennon, 1990; Freed et al., 2004). To be specific, immersion in the

natural L2 learning setting was related to his lexical diversity, accuracy, and especially higher fluency and comprehensibility (Llanes & Muñoz 2009, 2013; Muñoz, 2014; Saito, 2015).

Living in London, he got many chances to converse with other native or non-native speakers in his L2 and used English on a daily basis, at least two hours per day. When he interacted with others, he appeared to pay selective attention to the frequent and essential words in daily communication (Nation & Webb, 2011) and specific linguistic features closely related to comprehensibility (Saito, 2015). In this way, he could understand a great deal of “Englishes” spoken by non-native speakers with different L1s and produce L2 in an intelligible and comprehensible way to achieve successful L2 communication (Levis, 2005).

Moreover, Li mentioned that he would make full use of the ‘office hour’ and grab every chance to communicate with his tutors, who were mainly native speakers or competent interlocutors. During this conversation interaction, he may encounter communicative breakdowns, and one key construct, negotiation for meaning, will happen, which productively combines input, internal learner abilities (especially selective attention), and output (Long, 1996) and hence facilitates Li Dong’s L2 acquisition.

Regarding suprasegmental learning, many studies indicate that studying abroad can facilitate L2 learners’ suprasegmental production, including prosody (word and sentence stress, intonation) and fluency (breakdown, speed, repair) (Derwing, Munro, Thomson & Rossiter, 2009; Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012). Living in a target-language-speaking environment with abundant L2 experience, it was possible for Li Dong to improve and internalize his L2 suprasegmental performance, which may “impact the automatization of phonetic encoding and articulation processes during L2 speech production” (Saito, 2015, 2018).

Furthermore, Li Dong did not learn L2 intentionally, such as by exploring the grammar rules explicitly during this period, but used it as a communication and learning tool spontaneously, which triggered the implicit mechanism of SLA (DeKeyser, 2000). In terms of his school life, he had to read English materials, write English essays to complete the assignments, and communicate with his peers or teachers in English. In daily life, he encountered English every day and may have noticed new words or expressions frequently. During this process, incidental learning happened, especially vocabulary gains of both single-word items and collocations (Jin & Webb, 2020; Webb, Newton & Chang, 2013).

Lastly, as for the length of Li’s study years, he has been studying English for about thirteen years and has one year of experience studying abroad and living in a target-language-speaking environment. In addition to the time of classroom learning, he also spent a lot of time practicing his L2 outside of the classroom, which may be a significant predictor of his L2 success and highly comprehensible oral proficiency (Muñoz, 2008, 2014).

#### **4. A Description of the Relevant Personal Characteristics**

In addition to learner-external factors, learner-internal factors also play an essential role in L2 acquisition and speaking (e.g., aptitude, individual motivation, and personal characteristics), as suggested by many studies (Mora, 2022; Saito, Suzukida, Tran & Tierney, 2021; Shao, Saito & Tierney,

2023).

Firstly, aptitude has a significant effect since “talented” L2 learners can process L2 input more efficiently and/or effectively, facilitating their learning and bringing larger language gains. In this study, the LLAMA test developed by Meara (2020) was used to measure Li’s language aptitude, which is a widely used free test in SLA research (Roehr, 2008; Saito, Suzukida & Sun, 2019; Doughty & Mackey, 2021). Li completed all four subtests, including sound recognition (LLAMA D), sound-symbol associations (LLAMA E), rote vocabulary learning (LLAMA B), and grammar inferring (LLAMA F), the test scores for which were 13/20, 3/20, 2/20, and 9/20, respectively. Li’s score for sound recognition was 65% accuracy, while the average score of all the test takers was 55% correct (Meara, 2020). This indicates that Li may be talented at learning pronunciation without awareness and intention, which is an implicit learning ability (Saito, 2017). Moreover, according to the study conducted by Granena (2013), sound learning ability is relevant to long-term differences in L2 acquisition, and the LLAMA D test score of Li Dong is closely associated with his L2 metalinguistic knowledge attainment.

In addition to aptitude, motivation is also a well-researched variable in SLA, and many studies suggest that an L2 learner’s motivation is a significant predictor of their language success (e.g., You, Dörnyei & Csizér, 2016). To explore Li Dong’s motivation in depth, a structured interview was conducted and Li also finished a motivation questionnaire adapted from Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009). Based on the framework of Dörnyei’s (2005) L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS), the result shows that Li had a very strong Ideal L2 Self (he got full marks) while his Ought-to L2 Self was quite weak. Several research indicates that the Ought-to L2 Self may not be a substantial facilitator because the results of the association between the Ought-to L2 Self and learning motivation are contradictory (e.g., Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Liu & Thompson, 2018). Therefore, Li’s low ought-to L2 self may not impact his language proficiency greatly. The Ideal L2 Self, which refers to the self-image imagined by the L2 learner in the future, is a significant factor in L2 learners’ motivation, language learning experience, and oral proficiency development (e.g., Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Teimouri, 2017; Saito, Dewaele, Abe & In’nami, 2018). With a high Ideal L2 Self, Li Dong was urged to learn L2 to reduce the discrepancy between what he currently was and the future image in his imagination, resulting in greater learning gains and even beating the CPH hypothesis to achieve native-like L2 oral proficiency with intensive instruction in pronunciation (Bongaerts, 1999).

Moreover, Kormos et al. (2011) demonstrated that the Ideal L2 Self was associated with the International Posture, which refers to learners’ wish or interest in using English as a communication tool in international affairs and going abroad to interact with multinational partners (Yashima, 2002). In the questionnaire and interview, Li showed his strong willingness to speak English with foreigners and to work in an international company to use English fluently in the future. This could be regarded as an additional motive for him and stimulate him to improve L2 with a more targeted goal, which is to be a highly comprehensible speaker considering the sociolinguistic and socio-educational influence of English in a globalized world (Yashima, Nishida, & Mizumoto, 2017; Sato, 2020).

In the L2 motivation research field, another significant

construct, emotion, has also been emphasized and explored by many researchers in recent years (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Teimouri, 2017), and it can be divided into positive emotions like foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and negative emotions like foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016). To explore Li Dong's FLE and FLCA, Li was asked some related questions in the interview and also completed the FLE questionnaire and FLA questionnaire used in Dewaele's (2019) study. The result demonstrates that Li Dong has a relatively low level of FLCA and a very high level of FLE in all three subscales, including teacher appreciation, and personal and social enjoyment. For FLCA, a great number of studies have shown that it plays a negative role in SLA, reducing learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018), motivation (Papi, 2010), and, consequently, language success (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). By contrast, many SLA studies have reported positive effects of FLE, such as enhancing learning motivation, especially Ideal L2 Self (Saito et al., 2018), and boosting learning behaviors (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), resulting in better learning outcomes (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Therefore, Li's emotions can also be a significant predictor of his learning behavior, especially his WTC in the L2, which plays an important role in L2 communication (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004; Derwing & Munro, 2013), contributing to his success in L2 speaking proficiency.

Furthermore, Li Dong mentioned that his anxiety in the classroom mainly resulted from his personal characteristics, not his oral proficiency. As an introverted person with strong self-esteem, he was afraid of making mistakes both in language classrooms and in daily life. This is consistent with many SLA studies that explored the relationship between anxiety and personality (e.g., Dewaele, 2013; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015). Since personality traits also play a role in SLA and influence learners' FLE and FLCA (Pan & Zhang, 2021), Li also completed the Big Five-personality questionnaire. He scored quite high on Openness-to-Experience, which is significantly associated with intelligence (McCrae & Costa, 1985), organizational skills, pragmatic abilities, as well as the improvement of monitoring strategies in SLA (Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002). Moreover, open-minded individuals are typically predisposed to seek hidden patterns (Ehrman, 2008), engage in intellectually stimulating activities (Furnham & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2006), and be active in educational settings encouraging critical and original thoughts (Farsides & Woodfield, 2003), consequently resulting in higher oral proficiency and language acquisition. Therefore, Li's success in SLA can also be predicted by his personality traits.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### (1) Findings

Based on the above analysis, a great number of factors in determining Li's success in L2 speech proficiency have been revealed, which can be further divided into learner-external and learner-internal factors.

In terms of external factors, the quality and quantity of input play a significant role in Li's L2 development. In addition to the input gained from the language class, Li exposed himself to a large number of comprehensible language materials outside the classroom, including some high-quality authentic essays and videos, which facilitated his language acquisition, especially his vocabulary gains. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) also found a similar pattern of learning.

They did a case study of a learner of French and explored whether an extensive reading programme could facilitate lexical gains. They chose 133 words in total as target words and investigated whether one month of extensive reading helped students learn the spelling, meaning, and grammatical properties of these words. The findings revealed that extensive reading can bring in increased vocabulary development, especially in the aspect of spelling.

Moreover, during the period of studying abroad, Li got the chance to receive more input in social interaction with native or non-native speakers, facilitating his L2 speech learning further. This finding is consistent with other research. For instance, Kuhl, Tsao, and Liu (2003) revealed that American infants with exposure to foreign sounds through interaction gained more phonetic development than those who got the same amount of input through audiovisual or audio-only recordings. This indicates that interacting with a live person is more facilitative than merely exposing yourself to a televised or audio-only input for L2 speech acquisition. Saito and Wu (2014) also found that by processing new sounds in online teacher-student interaction, college-level students could develop their L2 skills in various aspects of phonetic and phonological learning even with a limited amount of instructional treatment.

As for internal factors, the effect of motivation cannot be ignored in Li's L2 achievement. His strong Ideal L2 Self motivated him to improve his language proficiency significantly. This finding replicates other SLA studies such as Dörnyei and Csizér's (2005) study. By measuring the motivation and attitude of 8,593 Hungarian pupils with 5 different L2s and interpreting the classification using Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, they examined the combined effects of the learners' different motivational profiles on different L2s. The results showed that participants who developed a strong ideal L2 self successfully were inclined to be interested in foreign languages and, subsequently, to increase their intended language learning effort.

Moreover, Li's implicit aptitude for sound recognition, measured by the LLAMA-D test, significantly facilitates his L2 speech learning. This effect was also uncovered in Saito, Sun, and Tierney's (2019) study. They assessed the sensitivity to segmental and suprasegmental features of speech in 48 Chinese English learners in the UK using behavioral (language and music aptitude tests) and neurophysiological (electroencephalography) measures. Subsequently, they compared the participants' aptitude profiles to their L2 speech proficiency, analyzed through rater and acoustic judgments. The results indicated that the neural encoding ability of participants with implicit aptitude was enhanced, contributing to their segmental attainment.

Lastly, Li's personality and emotions also contribute to his language success. As an open-minded person, he was willing to be immersed in various language settings and communicate with both native and non-native speakers, which brought him a great deal of enjoyment and subsequently motivated him to continue improving his proficiency. This pattern of learning is also reflected in other SLA studies. Belnap et al. (2016), for instance, intended to boost the endurance of 52 American language students by enhancing their satisfaction and self-regulation abilities when they encountered communication challenges during an intensive Arabic program. After collecting data from journals, interviews, and oral proficiency tests, they found that learners' progress in L2 proficiency was

positively linked to their satisfaction and enjoyment of speaking Arabic.

#### (2) Theoretical contributions

The findings of this paper are consistent with several major language learning theories, in particular, Krashen's input model (1985, 1989, 1992). The Input Hypothesis assumes that learners acquire languages by understanding messages. Precisely speaking, 'comprehensible input' is essential in language acquisition and the input needs to contain 'i+1', which means that the aspect of language (e.g., words, grammatical forms, pronunciation) has not been acquired by learners but is only one step beyond their interlanguage levels. In addition, learners' motivation is also a significant factor. The acquirers should be 'open' to the message with a low affective filter (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). According to the Input Hypothesis, language acquisition can occur without instruction. In other words, while language development may occur outside the classroom incidentally, only comprehensive input can promote proficiency, including vocabulary and spelling. Therefore, the Input Hypothesis can explain Li's language development in most of his learning experiences when he was exposed to a great deal of comprehensible input outside the classroom with strong motivation.

Regarding Li's language development during his study-abroad period, it is highly associated with the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996; Mackey, 2012). Extending from the Input Hypothesis, Long claims that the process of negotiation for meaning during conversations makes input comprehensible (Long, 1983). To be specific, when learners interact with native or non-native speakers, there may be communication breakdowns, resulting in interactional modifications such as clarification requests, confirmation, and repetition with a questioning intonation. During this process, the input becomes more comprehensible to learners, leading to their comprehensible output, which stimulates them to repair their speech errors and consequently facilitates their language acquisition (Long, 1996; Mackey, 2012). From this perspective, we can better understand Li Dong's language achievement during his postgraduate learning in London, where he finally got the opportunity to interact with others and create comprehensible output both in the classroom and in daily life.

#### (3) Practical contributions

This paper focuses on the speech proficiency of a relatively experienced, advanced L2 speaker, and explores the crucial factors affecting his learning. Based on the findings, there are some practical suggestions for many other L2 learners to acquire the target language efficiently and effectively.

Firstly, the amount of high-quality input is essential in L2 learning, especially for learners who do not have access to authentic learning environment. It is suggested to acquire language such as vocabulary knowledge incidentally by reading or watching videos outside of the classroom, especially for learners with high-level implicit aptitude (Krashen, 1989; Granena, 2013). Moreover, due to the possibility that past L2 vocabulary knowledge influences the comprehension and the amount of vocabulary learned through extensive reading and watching, it may be more appropriate for learners to measure their vocabulary size first and choose the suitable reading levels to make efficient progress in L2 acquisition (Webb, 2015). In addition, many researchers suggest that various aspects of language input should be treated differently, so it is useful for learners to combine incidental learning with intentional learning (Nation, 2001;

Pigada & Schmitt, 2006).

Secondly, learners' emotions and motivation have a huge impact on their language development. As for emotions, it is highly recommended for learners to have some positive emotion training and improve their abilities to deal with emotions, such as recognizing others' emotions in different ways (e.g., facial expression, gesture, body movement), generating positive emotions, and understanding the causes and outcomes of emotions (Li & Xu, 2019). Regarding motivation, L2 acquirers must recognize the importance of motivation and enhance their Ideal L2 Self, which could be achieved in the language classroom. According to Sato's study (2021), using vision-based teaching and dividing the learning objectives into smaller, more manageable chunks may be helpful in motivating students to learn.

Lastly, interaction also plays a significant role in SLA. Learners need to be involved in interactional and authentic language use and acquire language skills for communication. For teachers, adopting a Task-based Language Teaching approach and building a student-centered classroom may be beneficial to trigger interaction and achieve communicative outcomes (Ellis, 2003, 2009).

#### (4) Limitations

There are two major limitations to this study. The first one concerns the validity of the test measures. Due to the limits of time, the test measures of many variables are somewhat invalid. For instance, as for the participant's frequency and amount of oral language use, this study did not use other more sophisticated approaches such as observation (Kubey, Larson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), which may increase the accuracy and reliability of the data. For the assessment of oral proficiency, it is necessary to recruit a variety of raters, including both native and non-native raters (Saito & Hanzawa, 2015), raters with and without experience with foreign accents and language teaching in the target language (Saito et al., 2015). Moreover, the language aptitude test LLAMA has also not been adequately validated with many contradictory research results (Singleton, 2017; Bokander & Bylund, 2020). Therefore, with more suitable and reliable testing tools, the role of the participant's aptitude in his speech learning may be explored more accurately.

The second limitation is associated with emotion. Since emotions are unstable constructs, influenced by a great number of context-specific factors (Dewaele, Witney, Saito & Dewaele, 2018; Pan & Zhang, 2021), it is not appropriate to summarize the long-term relationship between the participant's emotions and his language acquisition based on his current emotional status. In addition, the results of many emotion studies in SLA are not unified (Dewaele et al., 2019). Therefore, the influence of the participant's emotions on his L2 learning should be analyzed more carefully from different perspectives.

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