

# A Critical Review of Socio-Interactive Practices and Personality in Adult Learners of English with Little Formal Education

Tao Tao

Jiangxi University of Technology, Nanchang, Jiangxi, 330000

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**Abstract:** This study experiences 3 steps to achieve its established goals according to Ramírez-Esparza, Harris, Hellermann, Richard, Kuhl, & Reder, (2012). First, qualitative and quantitative observational analyses are conducted (Longabaugh, 1980; Streeck & Mehus, 2005) to explore differences in socio-interactive practices between learners with little or no formal education and those with formal education in their homeland before starting ESL classrooms in USA; then, quantitative study giving learners time in each behaviour is to observe the relationships between behavioral personality and previous educational experience; Last, literacy assessment is conducted to analyse how socio-interactive practices and displays of personality relate to learners' scores based on standardized measures.

**Keywords:** Review; Socio-Interactive Practices; Personality; Adult learners

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## Introduction

This paper is a critical review of a research article published in the journal of Language Learning by Nairán Ramírez-Esparza<sup>1</sup>, Kathryn Harris<sup>2</sup>, John Hellermann<sup>3</sup>, Clemence Richard<sup>4</sup>, Patricia K. Kuhl<sup>5</sup> and Steve Reder<sup>6</sup> in Volume 62, Issue 2, Pages 541-570, June 2012. The chosen article aims to understand the learning procedures and principles of people with little education in their original countries by studying their socio-interactive behaviors and expression of personality behaviors in learning English as a second language classrooms. The reason why I prefer this article is that it has a close connection with what I have recently learned from several theorists in the field of Second Language Acquisition which interests me to a large extent. Therefore, my review will begin with an overview of the theoretical perspective underlying this particular article, then the main arguments by the author will be summarised and criticised before the discussion of some relevant implications of the article which has contributed to the SLA theory, finally I will complete my review with a conclusion.

## 1. Theoretical Framework

As for the theoretical rationale, two SLA theories or perspectives underlying this particular article could be discovered, they are social interaction of the psychologist Lev Vygotsky and personality of Wright & Taylor respectively. The socio-interaction suggests that language develops primarily from social interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) while personality shows the comparatively consistent and stable traits of individuals that tell one from another (Wright & Taylor, 1970). In the former, language learners are able to perform better via the support from interaction with more capable peers within their own ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), for example, children will be able to advance to a higher level of knowledge and performance when their parents provide a scaffolding. (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

To be more specific, according to the literature of the study, socio-interactive practices such as starting tasks, asking and offering help to other classroom participants are placed in both formal educational settings and informal ones, with the purpose to fostering the development of particular cognitive skills (Scribner & Cole, 1973) and to making sure that an activity to be learned is clear both in vision and from custom (Lave & Wenger, 1991), so informal learning takes place through interactive activities with a higher level member while formal learning requires more cognitive, cultural, and literacy skills. Concerning

the relationship between personality and language learning, one of the characteristics, extroversion-introversion (Dewaele & Furnham, 1990, 2000), was introduced as a great influence on success in second language learning. Wong-Fillmore (1979) suggests that an extroverted learners are more willing to talk and communicate with people in large groups; however, he also (1979) found that, in some learning environment, the quiet observant learner may be more successful.

## 2. Summary

In the executive phases, the data are from The Multimedia Adult English Learner Corpus (MAELC), which is operated in cooperation between Portland State University and Portland Community College for 4 years from 2001 to 2005, including 700 participants with 4000 hours of video-recorded classroom interaction to observe the focal participants triangulately (Ramírez-Esparza et al. , 2012) and can be stated as microethnographic (Erickson & Schultz, 1981; Streeck & Mehus, 2005); later on these data are in reserve on a server and retrieved and played for using ClassAction Toolbox for further analysis and view (Reder et al. , 2003).

As for the results, three findings are elicited according to the target goals of the research, they are described as follows (Ramírez-Esparza et al. , 2012):

(1) Low-education learners tended to start peer dyadic interactions as well as ask for help a lower percentage of the time than high-education learners.

(2) The rate of time that the low-education learners displayed behavioral extroversion was lower than that for a similar display by the high-education ones.

(3) Results show that for the types of socio-interactive practices, positive relations were gained for Starting and negative correlations for Novice Role; for personality, Introversion correlated negatively and Extroversion positively with test scores.

Still, further analyses were adopted for those correlations to measure gaps between low- and high-education learners for socio-interactive and personality (Ramírez-Esparza et al. , 2012).

## 3. Critique

Overall, the research has reached its goals as expected. Concerning the strengths, on the one hand, both qualitative and quantitative data are collected with their aims to search for the richest possible data and to control variables which influence the research to the minimal extent (Holliday, 2010); on the other hand, due to the complexity of SLA (Larsen-Freman, 1997), the study involves three disciplinary perspectives: sociological, linguistics, and psychological approaches integrating all together in order to make the audience understand.

With regard to limitations, to begin with the theoretical framework of personality, only extroversion and introversion has been introduced by the authors, however, Brown (2000) indicates self-esteem inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety, empathy, extroversion and introversion are all personality characteristics. Also, educational background should be seen as a key factor when studying the relationship between personality and learning (Ramírez-Esparza et al. , 2012), thus, the number of variables may not be enough to verify the research. Also, one research result that the test scores of low-education learners were much lower than those of high-education learners was drawn as predicted, this indicates that four years' research time is still insufficient to witness the potential progress which low-education learners would make; finally, the adopted assessment only measured two time points, so it is hard to verify the research possibility and still need further examination (Ramírez-Esparza et al. , 2012).

Regarding socio-interactive practices, low-education learners often found some of the activities, interactions and tasks too difficult to involve; also, the assessment system seems to be in the inappropriate level for those low-education students. However, this sort of puzzle doesn't exist in the high-education learners. Therefore, recommendation for this should be the present of ZPD theory (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989).

## 4. Implications and Insights

This research provides a great support and further development to socio-interaction and personality in SLA. It indicates that low-education learners could make progress in socio-interactions despite some difficulties in formal learning settings and took longer time to understand literacy practices. Furthermore, teachers or facilitators could mix those 2 kinds of learners together in one class where high-education learners can guide low-education students to a more effective participation (Rogoff, 1990).

Personality related to learning scores can only be found in low-education learners among which introverted learners performed worse than extroverted students on literacy assessment (Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002). This shows educational back-

ground, personality and previous experience should be considered when presenting new language in classroom settings.

Reviewing this research article enables me to understand the socio-interaction and personality perspectives of SLA to a further extent and consolidate the knowledge which I have learned. Besides using language to express our own ideas through communications, sometimes people construct their individual interactions, which may be different according to their various personalities, with themselves before presenting them. Moreover, the study leads to a prospective hypothesis to imagine how experience with formal education would influence SLA. However, I dissent from this assumption because learners might come from various cultural backgrounds in which the standard of formal education experience is different, additionally, it will be challenging to carry out relevant research, especially quantitative one, to measure the specific level of experience of formal education for those different learners.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the study has already examined the effect of socio-interactive practices and personality on adult learners of English with little formal education, with mixed research methods, valid data or results to the research questions and so on. Although the study was published only a few years ago, it is still exploratory and persuading to a large extent.

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