

1 Socio-Psychological Predictors of EFL Learners' English 2 Language Proficiency

3 Rou-Jui Sophia Hu¹

4 ¹ Cheng Shiu University

5 *Received: 11 December 2012 Accepted: 4 January 2013 Published: 15 January 2013*

6

7 **Abstract**

8 By extending the findings of Hu's (2001) investigation on how socio-psychological variables
9 and EFL students' English language proficiency are related, this study examines the
10 demographic significance between different target groups and the subsequent implications
11 towards predictions of EFL proficiency, thereby further assisting EFL practitioners. Stepwise
12 multiple regression analyses reveal that as the predominant factor, self-confidence, accounts
13 for 39

14

15 **Index terms**— socio-psychological variables, stepwise multiple regression analysis, self-confidence, technolog-
16 ical institute students, efl.

17 **1 Introduction**

18 socio-psychological variables have been widely discussed in second language acquisition since the 1970s.

19 Considerable research has established a strong correlation between sociopsychological variables and second
20 language acquisition (e. g. Clement et al., 1994;Dornyei, 1990a;Dornyei, 1990b;Gardner, 1979;Gardner,
21 1982;Gardner, 1983;Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Labrie & Clement, 1986). With the increased amount of
22 sociopsychological research in a foreign language milieu (e.g. Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1994;Dornyei,
23 1990a;Dornyei 1990b; Lin & Warden, 1998;Rahman, 2005;Warden & Lin, 2000, 2005), most research has focused
24 only on one or two variables, including attitudes or different motivation types.

25 However, social and psychological variables in an Asian EFL context have seldom been addressed. This study
26 extends the finding of Hu's (2001) study by contrasting different participants to determine English language
27 proficiency attainment of EFL learners, based on socio-psychological factors in an Asian context. a) Background
28 of the Problem As English is a compulsory subject taught in Taiwanese secondary education, language proficiency
29 is required for high school and university admissions. Tertiary education in Taiwan is categorized into universities
30 and technological institutes.

31 Students admitted to universities come mainly from senior high schools, while most students admitted to
32 technological institutes come from vocational high schools. English language proficiency of most technological
33 institute students is inferior to that of university students because students with high scores on their high school
34 entrance examinations can select which senior high school they want to attend. However, students scoring low
35 on those examinations normally choose to study at vocational high schools (Hu, 2007(Hu, , 2011)).

36 As is widely assumed, low academic achievement often results in a diminished sense of selfefficacy. Low
37 self-confidence, deactivated motivation, and other interrelated variables may subsequently lead to unsatisfactory
38 English language acquisition skills. Thus, further investigating the relationship between socio-psychological
39 variables and English language proficiency of Taiwanese technological institute students is of worthwhile interest.

40 **2 II.**

41 Literature Review a) Socio-psychological variables Gardner and Lambert (1959) successfully explained sec-
42 ond/foreign language acquisition from a socio-psychological perspective for the first time. Their studies posited
43 that the motivation for language learners to learn a second/foreign language hinge on their attitude towards the

6 C) INSTRUMENT

44 target language society and their orientation during language learning. The twelve years study in the Philippines
45 and the United States examined how attitude and motivation influence language proficiency attainment. Notably,
46 Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified two orientations towards language learning: integrative and instrumental,
47 which were based on two clusters of attitudes. Socio/affective or sociopsychological perspectives have received
48 increasing attention (Deci & Ryan, 1985;Maple, 1982;Oller et al., 1977;Schumann, 1978;Spolsky, 1969;Stauble,
49 1978). Gardner (1985) postulated that second language acquisition combined sociological and psychological
50 variables by intertwining individuals and cross-cultural interactions. Ramage (1990) found that his study
51 participants, high school students, when positively and intrinsically motivated to learn, wanted to attend
52 college. Chang (1997) demonstrated that as opposed to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation provided more
53 potential in second language learning through means of creativity and conceptual learning, ultimately fostering
54 an intellectual desire for challenges, as well as a sense of accomplishment.

55 Rahman (2005) investigated attitude and motivation orientations of Bangladeshi undergraduate students in
56 a private university towards learning English. According to their results, students focused on English for its
57 utilitarian value, as opposed to integrative motivation. That study further demonstrated that the learners
58 studied English for "instrumental" reasons, as opposed to previous studies, which indicated that "integrative
59 motivation" was the dominant motivational orientation for Bangladeshi students to learn English.

60 Hu (2001) investigated how socio-psychological variables and English language proficiency of EFL learners
61 are related. Among the proposed sociopsychological variables of motivation, language shock, self-confidence,
62 dominance, attitude, and indirect culture contact, motivation accounted for the greatest variance in determining
63 the English language proficiency of EFL university students. Categorized as integrative motivation, learning
64 interest accounted for 31% of the variance in predicting English language proficiency of Taiwanese university
65 students (Hu, 2001). Krashen (2002) asserted that highly motivated learners with sufficient self-confidence, good
66 self-image, and low level of anxiety are better equipped to succeed in second language acquisition than others.

67 3 b) Gardner's social-psychological model of L2 learning

68 The rationale behind Gardner's social-psychological model of L2 learning was the belief that the acquisition of an
69 L2 was social-psychological rather than an educational phenomenon (Au, 1988) Schumann (1978) posited in the
70 acculturation model that in terms of second language acquisition, social and affective factors were the underlying
71 variables. That study further hypothesized that social factors and affective factors merged into a variable which
72 he called acculturation. His term "acculturation" referred to the partial social and psychological merging and/or
73 heterogeneous blending between the learner and target language (TL) group. That model assumed that the
74 extent of linguistic integration varied with the degree of cultural acclimation.

75 Social variables have seven embedded elements: dominance pattern, integration strategies (assimilation/
76 preservation/adaptation), enclosure, cohesiveness & size, congruence, attitude, and intended length of
77 residence. Psychological variables consist of language shock, cultural shock, motivation, and ego-permeability
78 III.

79 4 Methodology a) Participants

80 The study participants were sampled from a technological institute in southern Taiwan. Totally, 486 students,
81 233 male and 253 female from ten classes participated in this study. Their majors varied from social studies,
82 engineering, and business administration. All students had received the six-year standard formal English training
83 in the Taiwanese education system.

84 Given the nature of this study, selective subject sampling was necessary. While preferred in terms of
85 generalizability of findings, a random sample would have failed to produce the desired results in the focus of
86 technological institute students' EFL proficiency.

87 5 b) Procedure

88 Written permission was received from the students' instructors before the survey was administered. Students
89 were instructed to fill out their background information and express their opinions on a five-point Likert scale.
90 The grammar test and listening comprehension test were undertaken shortly afterwards. All instructions were
91 given in Chinese to ensure comprehension. The survey of the ten classes lasted up to four weeks.

92 6 c) Instrument

93 The instrument for measuring sociopsychological variables was a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained
94 fifty-seven statements pertaining to the students' learning motivation, experience regarding language shock, self-
95 confidence, dominance, attitude, and indirect culture contact. Of the six variables, motivation, language shock,
96 dominance, and attitude were variables adopted from Schumann's acculturation model ??1978); meanwhile self-
97 confidence and indirect culture contact were two variables adopted from our previous study.

98 These six hypothetical variables were selected based on the adjusted needs of the target's foreign language
99 context. The instrument for measuring students' English language proficiency consisted of two 50-question
100 multiple-choice English language proficiency tests: an English grammar test and a listening comprehension test.
101 The grammar test contained grammar and reading comprehension-related questions, while the listening test

102 contained short statements and dialogues. Both tests were taken from the pre-intermediate level General English
103 Proficiency Test (GEPT). As one of the most accessible and reliable English language tests in Taiwan, ??EPT
104 This observation indicates that the average technological institute student did not reach the threshold of pre-
105 intermediate level, let alone the intermediate one. We can thus infer that the preintermediate level could best
106 quantify the English language proficiency of the study participants.

107 Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was calculated to determine the internalconsistency
108 reliability, which was computed as .92, indicating that the questionnaire used in this study is a reliable instrument.

109 Pearson product-moment correlation analyses were also performed to explore the relationship between socio-
110 psychological statements and students' English language proficiency.

111 **7 d) Data analysis**

112 Whether two or more variables are related was using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation tests. This approach
113 is the conventional means of computing a correlation coefficient between variables that are linearly related
114 (<http://www.le.ac.uk/bl/gat/virtualfc/Stats/pear.html>). The correlation coefficient ρ varies between +1.00
115 and -1.00. A higher absolute value of the correlation coefficient implies a stronger relationship between two
116 variables (Maple, 1982). However, a correlational analysis can be viewed as assessing the contribution of an
117 independent variable to a dependent variable; while it typically does not illuminate, in the optimal sense, the
118 reality that most researchers want to study (Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, & Daley, 2000; Tatsuoka, 1973). Due to the
119 situation where most phenomena involve multiple effects, multiple egression was performed in this study as a
120 major analysis approach.

121 Stepwise multiple regression is an important means of locating the most significant predictor (sociopsycholog-
122 ical) variables within each criterion (English language proficiency) variable. Each variable is entered sequentially
123 and its value is assessed. A variable is retained if it contributes to the model. However, all other variables in the
124 model are then re-tested to determine if they still contribute to the model. Correspondingly, variables that no
125 longer contribute significantly are removed. Thus, this method ensures that the model includes only the smallest
126 possible set of predictor variables. While R denotes a measure of the correlation between the observed value and
127 the predicted value of the criterion variable, R Square (R^2) represents the square of the measure of correlation and
128 indicates the proportion of the variance in the criterion variable which is accounted for by the proposed model.
129 In this example, the proportion of the variance in English language proficiency was accounted for by our set of
130 predictor variables (i.e. socio-psychological variables). In essence, knowing the predictor (i.e. sociopsychological)
131 variables allows us to increase the prediction accuracy of our criterion (English language proficiency) variable.
132 The beta value is a measure of how strongly each predictor variable influences the criterion variable. Thus, a
133 higher beta value implies a greater impact of the predictor variable on the criterion variable.

134 (<http://www.palgrave.com/pdfs/0333734718.pdf>)

135 IV.

136 **8 Results**

137 **9 a) Correlational Analysis**

138 According to Table 1, "motivation", "language shock", "self-confidence", "attitude", and "indirect culture
139 contact" had a considerable amount of items correlating with two criterion measures at the .01 level of significance.
140 Among the correlated items, the items from self-confidence "I can sufficiently read English." (SELF22), "I am
141 proficient in English composition." (SELF24), and "I can learn a foreign language." (SELF 18) ranked the highest
142 (.41**), the second highest (.40**), and the fourth highest (.38**) correlation coefficients with one of the criterion
143 measures at .01 level of significance, respectively. Clearly, for the survey subjects, self-confidence is a major
144 criterion in determining their mastery of English. Under Motivation, "I am interested in learning English."
145 (MOTI7) scored the third highest (.39**) correlation coefficient with one of the criterion measures. Interest in
146 learning a foreign language (integrative-oriented motivation) also demonstrated its significance in determining
147 individual mastery of English proficiency. In this study, although 57 items were designed to predict two criterion
148 measures, the stepwise multiple regression program was run only with predictor items correlating at the .01 level
149 of significance. Totally, 33 items correlated at the .01 level of significance with at least one criterion variable. The
150 items were then put into the respective stepwise multiple regression equations of the grammar test and listening
151 test.

152 According to Table 2, six entered items accounted for a total of 31.1 % (R^2 at the last step) of variance in the
153 grammar test equation, suggesting a strong predictive power. The first and second entered items were both from
154 the predictor variable of selfconfidence, which accounted for 25 % of the variance, demonstrating its significant
155 contribution in predicting English language proficiency.

156 The remaining items entered were from the variables of motivation and indirect culture contact. According
157 to the non-multicollinearity characteristics of predictor items when applied to stepwise multiple regressions,
158 the entered items showed very distinctive traits from each other. The six entered items were as follows: "I
159 can sufficiently read English." (SELF22), "I am proficient in English composition." (SELF24), "I am interested
160 in learning English." (MOTI7), "I actively participate in intensive English programs to strengthen my English

11 DISCUSSION A) SELF-CONFIDENCE

161 skills." (INDI53), "I want to study in Englishspeaking countries." (MOTI5) and "I frequently read English language
162 magazines." (INDI49).

163 10 Model

164 According to Table 3, three entered items accounted for 16.5 % of variance in the listening test equation, indicating
165 a medium effect size. The entered items came from two predictor variables: selfconfidence and motivation. Two
166 variables from selfconfidence were entered at the first and third step, respectively. Again, self-confidence emerged
167 as the most significant predictor variable in the listening test equation. Based on the number of predictor
168 items entered into the sum total of the two regression equations, as well as the change in R2 when entered, the
169 component variables were listed in a descending order of importance:

170 1. Self-confidence: three items entered into two equations (total change in R2 = .39) 2. Motivation: two items
171 entered into two equations (total change in R2 = .08) 3. Indirect culture contact: three items entered into two
172 equations (total change in R2 = .02) V.

173 11 Discussion a) Self-confidence

174 Stepwise multiple regression analysis lends support to the strong predictive power of selfconfidence (total change
175 in R2 = .39) with a total of three self-confidence items entered into both of the equations.

176 Self-confidence seems to be what Taiwanese technological institute students lacks the most, due to their
177 own perception of academic inferiority (Hu, 2007(Hu, , 2011)). Clement, et al. (1994) assessed the role of
178 linguistic self-confidence, suggesting that anxiety and self-perception of L2 competence can be determinants of
179 L2 achievement, even in contexts lacking in opportunity to use L2. That study further indicated that anxiety
180 and self-confidence in the L2 classroom were intimately linked to educational processes. While investigating
181 EFL proficiency of Taiwanese university students in relation to their socio-psychological factors, Hu (2001)
182 indicated that motivation explained the most variance in predicting the English language proficiency of EFL
183 university students. Comparing the findings of Hu (2001) and those of this study reveal that self-confidence, not
184 motivation, of technological institute students is the major deciding factor for the successful mastery of foreign
185 language proficiency. For EFL university students, motivation, especially their interest in learning English,
186 played a significant role in predicting their attainment of English language proficiency. However, for technological
187 institute students, selfconfidence preceded motivation and accounted for the greatest variance in the prediction
188 of their English language proficiency. This result corroborates with the observation that the low self-confidence
189 of Taiwanese technological institute students in academic achievements had evidently impeded their English
190 language acquisition skills.

191 Above results clearly demonstrate that low self-confidence, language anxiety, and demotivation in a foreign
192 language environment were bounded phenomena. b) Motivation MOTI7 ("I am interested in learning English.")
193 ranked as the highest correlation coefficient among motivational items; it entered both criterion equations at
194 significant levels. Dornyei (1990b) noted that intended contact with target language speakers was significantly
195 related to affectively based motivation. Instrumental items (such as MOTI3—"English is useful when travelling.",
196 and MOTI5—"I want to study in Englishspeaking countries.") were also found to correlate with EFL measures.
197 However, neither of the items were sufficiently influential to be entered into the equations. Dornyei (1990b)
198 suggested that instrumental goals played a prominent role in acquiring English skills up to an intermediate level.
199 However, Clement et al. (1994) asserted that learners whose interest in learning English included sociocultural
200 and nonprofessional considerations demonstrated the highest degree of desired proficiency. That is, those students
201 wished to master the English language rather than acquire only a minimalistic, functional grasp of it.

202 According to Clement et al. (1994), even in a context where foreign language learning was largely an academic
203 matter, student motivation remained socially-grounded. We can thus infer that regardless of the motivation,
204 learning without interest ultimately leads to null and void achievements. c) Indirect culture contact Taiwanese
205 foreign language students learn English primarily throughout their school years. However, the average student
206 is often not considered proficient in English, even after the completion of the formal, six-year English language
207 training. The obtained findings showed that not only did all of the survey's indirect culture contact items
208 significantly correlate with EFL measures, two indirect cultural contact items were also found to enter one
209 stepwise multiple regression equation.

210 This phenomenon has important implications for EFL practitioners in that students should be encouraged
211 to actively participate in related English activities. Related research has indicated that some learners are more
212 successful than others because they approach learning tasks with more efficient methods (Chamot, 1987;Oxford,
213 1992;Rubin, 1975). Huang and Tzeng (2000) examined how competent English achievers effectively utilize
214 available learning strategies. They found that nearly all participants adopted active attitudes in seeking input and
215 output opportunities to practice their English. In addition to passively receiving reading and listening materials
216 and instructions provided by their institutions, the study participants also actively searched for additional sources
217 of English input. The respondents were also found to effectively utilize their time by listening to English radio
218 programs, speaking English with friends or during class, reading English language materials, and leaving messages
219 in English. Huang and Tzeng (2000) claimed that in environments, such as Taiwan, where English was a foreign
220 language, a sufficient supply of English input and practice opportunities were necessary to fully immerse the

221 students in a meaningful foreign language experience. Additionally, learners needed to become self-motivated
222 to the extent that they could independently seek out English input and practice opportunities to increase their
223 English exposure.

224 **12 VI.**

225 **13 Conclusions**

226 This study thoroughly elucidates the sociopsychological variables for EFL learning among technological institute
227 students in Taiwan. Stepwise multiple regression analysis indicates that selfconfidence is the most significant
228 predictor variable of English language proficiency. We believe that the lack of self-confidence stems from the
229 students' history of lower academic performance than that of the average university student. While self-confidence
230 was perceived as an affective state, external supplementation through positive reinforcement, as well as socially
231 interactive encouragement may significantly boost students' selfconfidence. These technological institute students
232 were generally considered to be less academically successful than university students, resulting in a foreign
233 language acquisition impediment.

234 For technological institute students, therefore, building self-confidence with a foreign language not only involves
235 the learners' psychological state, but also additional effort on the language practitioners' behalf. Horwitz and
236 Young (1991) suggested that increasing students' knowledge of the language-learning process increased their
237 acquisition and self-confidence capabilities. Clement et al. (1994) noted that building self-confidence in second
238 language usage would lower learner anxiety and increase self-perceptions.

239 Motivation, the second most significant predictor in this study, was also the most significant predictor variable
240 in Hu (2001). Comparing those results demonstrated the significance and viability of academic background
241 based precursors towards English language proficiency of Taiwanese EFL learners. Additionally, senior high
242 school students appeared to be more confident of their academic achievement than their vocational high school
243 counterparts. Although not located as the most significant predictor, motivation was still a significant predictor
244 variable for technological institute students.

245 Therefore, motivating students, integratively or instrumentally, was vital when helping them build self-
246 confidence. When equally motivated, a major separator between technological institute students and university
247 students was the confidence stemming from their knowledge base: university students excelled in their existing,
248 broader academic foundation.

249 Academically underdeveloped, technological institute students were faced with the additional difficulty of
250 reconstructing a healthy selfconfidence. Moreover, comparing motivation and selfconfidence revealed that the
251 latter was a generally more difficult barrier: motivation could be externally influenced, while constructing self-
252 confidence required a systematic combination of various factors, including psychological, intellectual, and tactile
253 learning experiences.

254 The third significant predictor variable -i.e. indirect culture contact -was also noteworthy. Taiwanese language
255 teachers should encourage students to indulge themselves in popular, yet effective English learning strategies,
256 including watching English movies and TV programs (without Chinese language subtitles), as well as learning
257 English songs to further aid them in their learning process. When integrated into the student's learning
experience, all of the previous conditions can allow students to become proficient in English as a foreign language.

Figure 1:

258 1
259

13 CONCLUSIONS

1

Socio-Psychological Predictors of EFL Learners' English Language Proficiency		English Language Proficiency Variables	
Socio-psychological Variables		Grammar	Listening Test
			Test
	Motivation		
	I want to be a U. S. immigrant (MOTI1)	—	—
	I want to get a better job (MOTI2)	—	—
	English is useful when travelling abroad (MOTI3)	.13**	.10*
Year 2013	I want to be able to communicate with foreigners in English (MOTI4)	.25**	.22**
	(MOTI4) I want to study in English-based countries (MOTI5)	.27**	.25**
	I can obtain greater social appreciation (MOTI6)	—	—
2	I am interested in learning English (MOTI7)	—	—
20			
2			
34			
Volum	English is required for my schoolwork (MOTI8)	.39**	.31**
XIII	English is a required course (MOTI9)	—	—
Is-	I am interested in English-based cultures (MOTI10)	.32**	.24**
sue	Other reasons: _____ (MOTI11)	.26**	.15**
XIV	Language Shock	.30**	.20**
Ver-	I can communicate clearly when using English (LANG12)	.25**	.19**
sion	I can do impromptu conversation drills in class (LANG13)	.18**	—
I	I can emulate the teacher's pronunciation in class without feeling anxiety	.23**	.17**
Global	I have no difficulty when speaking in English	.38**	.30**
Jour-	I don't feel nervous when I don't understand what the addresser says to me in English (LANG16)	.31**	.23**
nal	When the addressee doesn't understand what I have said, I have the courage to say it again (LANG17)	.29**	.23**
of	Self-confidence I feel that I am talented in learning foreign languages (SELF18)	.33**	.24**
Hu-	I am talented in acquiring up a foreign language pronunciation (SELF19)	.41**	.30**
man	I am quick to pick up pronunciation techniques (SELF20)	.32**	.20**
So-	I can quickly learn new vocabulary (SELF21)	—	—
cial	I can sufficiently learn new vocabulary (SELF22)	.37**	.32**
Sci-	(LANG15)	.40**	.31**
ence		—	.10*
()		—	—
G		—	—
	I can listen to English language radio shows without difficulty (SELF23)	.37**	.32**
	I am capable of English composition (SELF24)	.40**	.31**
Dominance		—	—
U. S.	U. S. government policies can influence that of Taiwan's (DOMI25)	—	—
Taiwan's	The U. S. economy influences Taiwan's economy (DOMI26)	—	—

Figure 2: Table 1 :

2

predicting grammar test a					
Step	Predictor	F-to-enter	P	Multiple R	R 2
1	SELF22	100.37	.000	.433	.188
2	SELF24	72.74	.000	.501	.251
3	MOTI7	57.75	.000	.535	.286
4	INDI53	44.99	.002	.543	.295
5	MOTI5	37.41	.025	.551	.303
6	INDI49	32.24	.030	.557	.311

a

Figure 3: Table 2 :

3

predicting listening testb					
Step	Predictor	F-to-enter	P	Multiple R	R 2
1	SELF23	60.244	.002	.347	.120
2	MOTI7	38.518	.001	.386	.149
3	SELF24	28.985	.004	.407	.165

b Model

c) Ranking of hypothetical variables

Figure 4: Table 3 :

13 CONCLUSIONS

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