



Attribution Theory and Language Learning

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Abstract

Foreign language learning has gained importance over time due to the changes in the globalizing world and has become a necessity. Learning a second language improves an individual's memory and increases attention span. In addition, an individual's multitasking abilities improve as they learn to switch from one language to another. Therefore, foreign language learning has many advantageous aspects both cognitively and socially. This article discusses how second language learners evaluate learners' failure or success in learning a foreign language, as well as how their perspectives impact their performance. Attribution theory is a social psychology concept that examines how people explain the causes of events, as well as their own and others' behavior. First of all, this paper aims to give a brief information about attribution theory and to argue that the theory also holds the possibility of helping to explain why individuals are successful or unsuccessful in learning a language next the paper will give brief information about What is language? second language (L2), and finally second language learning and attribution theory will be presented and the significance of attribution theory in terms of foreign language (L2) will be investigated. The following document analysis collates evidence on the significance of attribution theory in language learning and basics of the teaching process, and also learners' causal attributions.

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Introduction

In today's globalized society, L2 learning is recognized as a critical component of the educational system. English, being the globe's lingua franca, has had an impact on language policies all over the world. For years, many countries, including Turkey, have incorporated English into their curricula. L2 learning is also a process that entails not just learning grammatical structures and vocabulary in the target language, but also improving skills and increasing cultural awareness (Brown, 1994). Many cognitive and affective elements influence EFL learners in this complex process, and learners' casual attribution is one of them. According to Fritz Heider (1958), language instructors and academics have long been concerned with providing effective language instruction. Hundreds of research have been undertaken to aid in the language learning process. An efficient learning environment requires an understanding of learners' ideas, perceptions, and learning experiences. Researchers have attempted to understand how learners make sense of their learning process to understand why some learners are more effective than others (Kalaja et al., 2015). From the mid-1980s, researchers have been focusing on learner perceptions, as they can influence the learning process and product. Early studies focused on the constancy of such ideas, whereas more recent studies have focused on the complex nature of beliefs and how some of them grow and change through time (Zhong, 2015).

The process of assigning a cause to an event is known as attribution. People look for reasons and explanations for their successes and failures to make sense of what they've seen and, as a result, forecast the course of comparable future behaviors and events. Weiner (1985) proposed that attributions are influenced by a person's self-perception, which in turn influence their expectations, values, emotions, and beliefs about their competence, and hence their motivation. The study examines causal attributions for success and failure on certain language learning tasks, using the theoretical framework of attribution theory.

This paper will first try to give brief information about attribution theory and language learning and briefly look at the complex issues involved with ESL. Second, what is the language? L2 and foreign-language are going to be presented at last, general implications of attribution theory and foreign language (L2) will be examined.

Method

The study will be conducted using the document analysis method, which is a qualitative research method. Document analysis is a type of data collecting that is required in virtually all studies. The research topic influences which documents are essential and can be utilized as data sources. The following sorts of documents, for instance, can be utilized as data sources in educational research: Educational textbooks, program (curriculum) instructions, internal and external correspondence, student records, meeting minutes, student guidance records and files, student and teacher handbooks, student coursework and exams, lesson and unit plans, teacher files, official educational documents, etc. (Gall et al., 1996)

What is language?

Language is a system of traditional spoken language, manuals (signs), or written symbols. Humans can express themselves as members of social groups and participants in their culture. The functions of language include communication, identity expression, games, imaginative expression, and emotional release (Robins et al., 2021).

Language, like culture, is another most important attribute of mankind. It is known for its unity in diversity: there are many languages and many cultures, although they are different, they are fundamentally the same because they exist in human nature, and because the basic attribute of this human nature is the way it allows for language and cultural diversity.

Learning a language takes a lot of time, effort, and energy. Every language student, from the most ardent aficionado to the most seasoned hyperpolyglot, has battled with learning at some point. That is a proven truth. None of those students, on the other hand, experienced the same difficulties acquiring their first language as youngsters. These first languages are all picked up quickly, naturally, and almost flawlessly. The second, third, and fourth languages (and so on) are the ones that cause us problems.

Several elements are all linked to the conditions in which a language is learned. Languages that have been learned in a variety of situations have been given several names:

L1, second language, non-native language, foreign language, L2, third language, L3, L4, L5, and so on are examples of first languages, mother tongues, native tongues, and native languages.

Knowing how to communicate the distinctions between the languages you know will be easier if you know how to utilize these phrases. To keep things tidy and orderly, we'll categorize all terms into three language classes: L1, L2, and L3.

Finally, a variety of linguistic definitions have been offered. "Language is the representation of thoughts using speech sounds integrated into words," said Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language expert. Words are joined into phrases, similar to how concepts are integrated into thoughts.

The definition of language in Collins dictionary;

Countable noun. A language is a system of communication that consists of a collection of sounds and written symbols that are spoken or written by the inhabitants of a certain nation or region (Collins Dictionary, 2021)

Synonyms: tongue, speech, vocabulary, dialect More Synonyms of language

Uncountable noun. The usage of a system of communication that consists of a collection of sounds or written symbols is referred to as language (Collins Dictionary, 2021)

Synonyms: speech, communication, expression, speaking.

Mother Tongue, First Language and Mother Tongue (L1). An L1 is your first language, your native language, or your mother tongue. The first language is the language in which learners are competent when starting a new language. A person's native language — that is, a language learned from birth — is referred to as their "mother tongue." A first language is also known as a dominant language, home language, or native tongue.

Foreign Language. A foreign language is not widely spoken in the speaker's own country. There must, however, be a clear difference made between a foreign language and a second language. It is also a language that is not spoken in the person's own country; for example, a Turkish speaker living in Britain can describe English as a foreign language, and a French speaker residing in Germany can describe German as a foreign language. However, these two definitions do not exhaust the range of possibilities, and the term is sometimes applied in ways that are either misleading or factually incorrect.

Second Language (L2). Any language other than one's first or native language is referred to as a second language. The terms L1 and L2 are widely used by linguists and educators to refer to a first or native language and a second or foreign language that is being learned, respectively.

A speaker's dominant language, or the one with which he or she is most familiar, is not always the same as the speaker's first language. The dominant language might also be the second. For example, the Canadian census defines the first language as "the first language learned in childhood and still spoken," acknowledging that some people lose their first language due to language attrition. When young children migrate to a new linguistic context, this can happen (Nordquist, 2020).

Attribution

Humans have a natural need to understand the reasons for their own and other people's actions. To identify the fundamental causes, they observe, reflect on, and evaluate the behaviors of every individual in their life, including their own. To put it another way, they are always looking for an answer to the question "Why?" to comprehend the world around them. Attributions are the explanations that these ignorant scientists come up with in their effort to understand the world daily for each given event.

Even if the circumstances are comparable or the same, one person's attributes may differ significantly from another's. Human attributions, in other words, are subjective, individual, and diverse, which is why they have been a hot topic in social psychology for decades. This simple interest in people's attributions has sparked extensive research in a variety of fields (Kelley & Michela, 1980), with educational research being one of them.

Many attempts have been made throughout the years to define what attributions areas they have been in the focus of scholars for decades.

- Forsyth (1980) defined the term attribution to help humans gain mental mastery over their perception of the world and control the course of events in their lives.
- Ellis (1985, p.32) defined it as "causal statements that answer "why something happened,"
- Dörnyei (1990) defined it as "individual attempts by learners to make sense of their success and failure".
- Ickes and Laydon (1976, p.2) defined it as "how individuals explain the causes of positive and negative events in their lives,
- Attributions were defined by Weiner (1992; 2010) as the subjective reasons and explanations of people for their failure or success at a task, test, or activity,

Types of Attribution. Why do we assign internal attributions to some objects while external attributions are assigned to others? Part of this has to do with the attribution type we're most inclined to utilize in a given situation. Cognitive biases frequently play a significant impact as well. The most common forms of attributions you'll encounter in everyday life are:

Interpersonal Attribution. When you're sharing a story with a group of friends or acquaintances, you're more likely to tell it in a way that puts you in the best light possible.

Predictive Attribution. We also tend to describe things in ways that help us to foresee the future. If your automobile is vandalized, you could blame it on the parking garage where you parked. As a result, to avoid more vandalism, you will avoid that parking garage in the future.

Explanatory Attribution. To make sense of the world around us, we utilize explanatory attributions. Some people explain things in an upbeat manner, while others are more negative. Positive events are attributed to stable, internal, and global causes by those with an optimistic personality, whereas negative events are attributed to unstable, external, and specific reasons by people with pessimistic personalities. Negative events are attributed to internal, stable, and global causes by pessimists, whereas positive events are attributed to external, stable, and specific reasons by optimists.

Attribution Theory

Attribution is a psychological concept that refers to how people interpret the reasons for their daily experiences as external or internal. Attribution theory is a term used to describe models that explain this process (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2010). Psychologist Heider (1958) pioneered attribution studies in the early twentieth century, while Kelley and Weiner (1979) took the idea further. Heider coined the term "perceived locus of causality" to describe how people interpret their surroundings. The study of how people understand events and how it affects their thinking and conduct is known as attribution theory. Attributions are described as a person's explanations for occurrences to better manage and anticipate similar events in the future (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1979). The idea of attribution is based on a naïve examination of human behavior. It's also known as "common sense psychology" (Kelly, 1992). According to Weiner (1991), individuals are "judges" who seek to understand the causes of events they witness. Because it is a hypothesis on how common sense works, the emphasis is on perceived rather than real causes. For example, the actual cause of a bad exam result would not be covered by attribution theory. Individuals strive to figure out why people do what they do, according to attribution theory. According to attribution theory, individuals strive to figure out why people do what they do, or assign reasons to behavior. When someone is trying to figure out why someone else did something, they may assign one or many reasons to that action. Attribution is based on a three-stage process:

1. The individual should be able to detect or see the behavior.
2. The individual should think that the activity was committed voluntarily,
3. The individual should decide whether the other person was compelled to execute the behavior (in which case the cause is attributed to the other person).

Weiner's attribution theory was centered on achievement (Weiner, 1974). He identified the most significant elements influencing accomplishment attributions as talent, effort, task complexity, and chance. Three causal dimensions are used to classify attributes: locus of control, stability, and controllability.

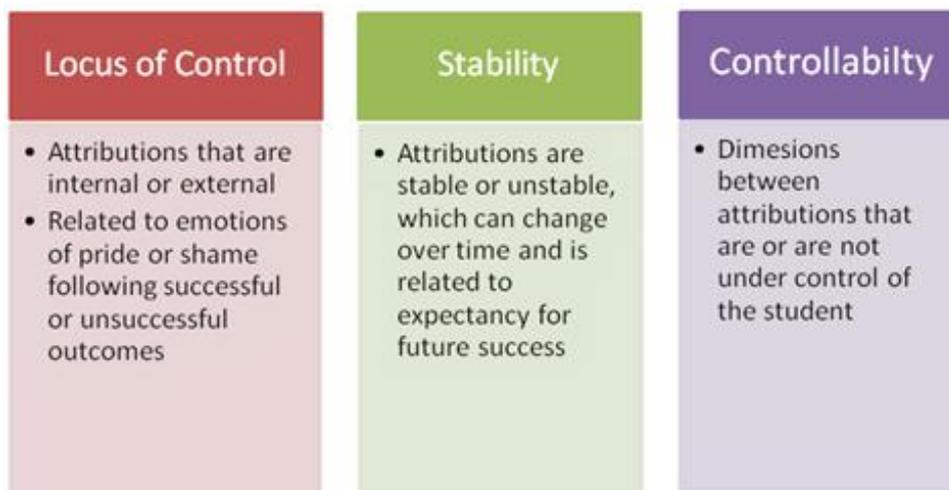


Figure 1. Dimensions of Attributions

Internal vs external dimensions are the two poles of the control of locus. Whether or whether the causes vary over time is determined by the stability dimension. Ability, for example, might be characterized as a stable, internal cause, whereas effort is unstable and internal. Manoeuvrability contrasts between elements that are under one's control, such as skill/efficacy, and those that are beyond one's control, such as aptitude, mood, others' behaviour, and chance. Table 1 demonstrates how the dimensions of locus, stability, and control may be used to integrate the attributions of ability, effort, luck, and task.

Table 1. Dimensional Classification Scheme for Causal Attributions

Attributions	Dimension		
	Locus	Stability	Controllability
Ability	Internal	Stable	Uncontrollable
Effort	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Strategy	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Interest	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Task difficulty	External	Stable	Uncontrollable
Luck	External	Unstable	Uncontrollable
Family influence	External	Stable	Uncontrollable
Teacher influence	External	Stable	Uncontrollable

Source: Adapted from Vispoel and Austin (1995), based on Weiner (1979)

Language Learning and Attribution Theory. Dörnei (2005) stated that due to the high rate of failure students encounter in learning a language in other words failing to achieve the required level of competency, attribution theory is especially important in language acquisition. It surely gives some hints regarding the learners' future actions by throwing light on their prior behaviors. As a result, knowing the various reasons for events might help you understand why some students succeed while others fail. According to Weiner (2000) attribution theory and learning L2, theory discusses how learners of a foreign language assess their failure or success, as well as how their perspectives impact their performance. Assisting students in being more aware of their attributional views has certain benefits for language learning and instruction. As Williams and Burden (1997) imply, language learners who are aware of their attributions are more likely to comprehend the cognitive underpinnings for their success.

Foreign Language Learning Attribution Theory. The importance of attribution theories in the field of foreign language learning has also been widely acknowledged and disclosed by most language scholars in Turkey and abroad. According to Gobel and Mori (2007), pupils that aren't as successful blamed their failure on a lack of talent and effort, whereas more successful students credited their success to professors and the learning environment. Pishghadam's research also indicated that university students of diverse majors attributed their successes and failures to a variety of factors. Furthermore, Hassaskhah and Vahabi (2010) found that the most common reason for failure in language studies was a lack of effort. Finally, the findings study revealed that learners ascribed their success and failure to both internal and external causes, with external factors taking precedence. It was also discovered that learner gender, competence level, and attributions all had significant correlations.

Attribution study has found a natural home in the academic arena as a theory of causal explanations for success and failure. It is generally established that attributing academic outcomes to variables like effort and the use of effective study techniques improves academic accomplishment, but attributing success to chance or other uncontrolled circumstances tends to hamper academic progress. Furthermore, seeing oneself as a low-ability individual has significant negative consequences, since low ability perception decreases individuals' expectations for future achievement (Weiner, 2000).

As a result, all of the studies to date appear to show that attribution theory is one of the important study subjects in language teaching and learning and that it is beneficial to investigate it from several angles.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study of attribution in the realm of education has become a popular issue during the last few decades. Empirical research of attribution theory and foreign language learning was conducted in this work. Language learners and instructors alike strive for high marks and performance; yet, learning and teaching a foreign language is a complex and difficult process that is never easy or one-sided. Internal, unstable, and controllable reasons should be ascribed to be successful, according to the literature, and if they can do this, they can manage the causes of their achievement and be more effective language learners in the future. Finally, while attributions on success and failure impact learners' performance, grades, and motivation, there are many other domains and aspects to consider and address, thus a future study on attribution training to modify their attributions toward learning a foreign language may be done.

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