

[Articles (論説)]

The Self Confidence Dimension in Cultural Adaptation and Foreign Language Acquisition: A Basis for Success in International Business

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Abstract

A previous quantitative and qualitative study carried out by the author demonstrated that many of the personality traits that facilitate cultural adaptation or adjustment (the ability to function at a high level in cross-cultural environments) also facilitate gaining fluency in foreign languages (Keeley, 2014; Keeley, 2013). The study employed Kozai Group's Global Competencies Inventory (GCI), a validated instrument for expatriate selection focusing on the psychological factors demonstrated to facilitate functioning in cross-cultural environments. In this paper it is argued that both cross-cultural adjustment and foreign language ability are both important human resource success factors in international business, especially during extended sojourns abroad. Self-confidence is one of the psychological traits measured by the GCI that exhibited very high correlation with the development of oral fluency in foreign languages. This trait (or GCI competency) is examined in detail in terms of how it facilitates cross-cultural adjustment and foreign language fluency, two critical human resource factors in global business.

Introduction

Cross-cultural interactions have greatly increased with the globalization of business. From a globalized business environment perspective, some people observe that cultural differences are sometimes suppressed as norms and values of individuals in the business community become more homogenous (Bird and Stevens, 2003). However, this is usually only the case when all the participants have significant experience in global business; and even in such a situation cultural differences are still bound to influence interaction among the participants from different cultures. Thus, it is important to be aware of the conditions in which cultural differences need to be recognized and dealt with effectively in order to avoid undesired outcomes. In other words, individuals need to be aware of the conditions under which cultural differences play an important role. The ability to recognize such conditions in a cross-cultural environment is greatly enhanced by learning the languages of the cultures.

Cross-cultural competence has been defined in terms of knowledge or “cultural literacy;” skills and abilities, including foreign language competence and stress management; and attitudes, which encompass personal traits such as curiosity and tolerance for ambiguity (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud 2006). In addition to adaptability, a critical component of a successful international professional career is learning a foreign language (Andreason, 2003, Graf, 2004). Cross-cultural adaptability was rated as the number one criterion for international managers, above job, technical and management skills (Flynn 1995). Furthermore, foreign language competence, adaptability, and respect for cultural differences have been rated as crucial skills for expatriate managers, along with intercultural communication skills and sensitivity (Graf, 2004).

Neyer and Harzing (2008) studied the impact of culture on interactions and found that previous experience with culturally determined behavior and experience working in a foreign language is found to foster norms that reduce conflict based on cross-cultural differences. They also concluded that experience working in a foreign language helps individuals to identify appropriate culturally determined behavior and, thus, to adapt to specific characteristics of the foreign culture. Their study supports previous findings that suggest that individuals who learn a foreign language might be subconsciously influenced by the culture embedded in that language, and acquire some of its characteristics (Yang and Bond, 1980).

Neyer and Harzing (2008) assert that the more experience individuals have in working in a foreign language, the more they are able to understand the nuances of culturally determined behavior. They develop a greater awareness of individuals’ cultural differences. Harzing concluded,

Individuals who are aware of the culturally determined nuances in language, which reflect a particular culturally-determined behavior expected by the counterpart, are more likely to avoid conflicts by using the appropriate wording and expressions ... In contrast, if people are not very experienced in working in a foreign language, language barriers can give rise to a large number of negative consequences: uncertainty and suspicion, deterioration of trust, and a polarization of perspectives, perceptions and cognitions (p. 14).

In a study including language variables on work adaptation of expatriate women in Japan, Taylor and Napier (1996) found language skills and age to be the most important personal attributes for successful adjustment. Language skills are an important determining factor of an expatriate’s ability to interact with host

country nationals and learn from interactions, refining his or her cognitive maps and behaviors. In a separate study, Haslberger (2005) also found that language skills (ability in the host country language) are positively related to cognitive and emotional adaptation in a foreign culture.

Working in a culturally different environment is always a challenge, so it is not surprising that the lack of cultural knowledge and language ability, as well as a difficulty to adjust to the local culture, are major factors contributing to expatriate failure (Briscoe & Schuler, 2004; Dowling & Welch, 2004). Dowling et al. (1999) mention that knowledge of the host-country's language is also very important for a successful international assignment, no matter what positions the expatriates take up. Expatriates who speak English and at least one other language are far better placed than managers restricted to English (Mead, 1998). Ronen (1986) argues that language education is also an effective indirect method of learning about a country, and perhaps the best way to make an international assignment successful.

Having total command of the language is not necessary, however efforts to speak the language, even if only parts of local phrases, shows that the expatriate is making a symbolic effort to communicate and to connect with the host nationals. The opposite, a resolute unwillingness to speak the language may be seen as a sign of contempt to the host nationals (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997). Not making a sufficient effort to learn the local language may reflect a degree of ethnocentrism, which is when one believes that one's culture is superior over other cultures (Dowling & Welch, 2004). This attitude can easily develop in the case of speakers of English (both native and non-native speakers) since English is often considered the lingua franca of international business. Furthermore, lacking ability in the host country language has strategic and operational implications as it limits the multinational's ability to monitor and process important information.

Neal (1998) carried out interviews with French expatriates in Britain and identified language problems as the major source of frustration, dissatisfaction, and friction between them and their British colleagues. The language barrier increased the French expatriates feelings of being outsiders. In addition, the lack of expatriate language ability was found to contribute to problems with interpersonal relations between Americans and Mexicans (Sargent & Mathews, 1998), as well as between Americans and Japanese (Wiseman & Shutter, 1994).

Selmer (2006) tested three hypotheses focusing on the relationship between language ability and cross-cultural adjustment. Namely, (1) language ability has a positive association with interaction adjustment; (2) language ability has a positive

association with general adjustment; and (3) language ability has a positive association with work adjustment. The study involved Western expatriate adjustment in China. Controlling for the time expatriates had spent in China, it was found that their language ability had a positive association with all adjustment variables. This positive relationship was strongest for interaction adjustment (obviously language ability in Chinese is an important factor when interacting with Chinese who have limited foreign language ability) and the weakest for work adjustment.

Foreign language ability and understanding local cultural norms and practices are also important competencies in business negotiations. According to Tayeb (1998), language is one the major issues when it comes to negotiations with trade partners from other countries. Dowling & Welch (2004) also point out that the ability to speak a foreign language can improve the expatriate's effectiveness and negotiating ability.

There should be a shared goal between intercultural training and foreign language instruction - developing intercultural communicative competence. This means it is necessary to draw from both the target language and culture bringing them together effectively. Fantini (1997) says it is surprising to find interculturalists and foreign language educators without proficiency in a second language. He asserts that more than the actual attainment in proficiency is the fact that without a second language experience, they have not grappled with the most fundamental paradigm of all - language learning and the beliefs that derive from the process. He stated,

For all the research and concepts about other cultures and worldviews, the monolingual ESOL teachers or interculturalists engage mostly in intellectualized endeavors when concepts are not also accompanied by direct experiences of other cultures and languages. Without an alternative form of communication, we are constrained to continue perception, conceptualization, formulation, and expression of our thoughts from a single point of view. Despite our ability to discuss ad infinitum intercultural concepts in our own tongue, our experiences remain vicarious and intellectualized; lacking multiple perspectives ... characterized as monocular vision, which can lead to narrow smugness or a smug narrowness. (p. 4)

Lack of foreign language ability is also a significant weakness among academics researching cross-cultural topics. There are many researchers who do not speak or read the language of the group they are researching. This was very

apparent in the 1980s when many Western writers focused on Japanese management and sought to understand the alleged power of Japanese management (Keeley, 2001). Another example is the weakness of Hofstede's fifth dimension, Long-Term Orientation, which is supposedly based on a Chinese cultural perspective (Fang, 2003; Keeley, 2012). This dimension was developed with the assistance of Michael Bond, who, in spite of focusing on China for many years while based in Hong Kong, has next to non-existent ability in Chinese. Personal knowledge and experience in the language of the target culture in cross-cultural research is essential for a deep understanding.

Two of the most important human resource issues for organizations during this age of increasing globalization are expatriate failure and intercultural ineffectiveness. According to the US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis in 2009, there are 31.3 million international workers globally and worldwide sales by multinational corporations were over \$ 11 trillion US. The costs associated with expatriate failure have been and still are an important human resource issue not only among multinationals but also any company that sends its employees to work abroad for an extended period. According to Bird and Dunbar's study (1991), failure rates of expatriates sent for overseas assignments had reached 50% by the early 1990s. Whether or not an expatriate returns prematurely from his or her overseas assignment is the one of the most frequently applied measures for cross-cultural adjustment. According to von Kirchenheim and Richardson (2005), by utilizing this criterion, studies overwhelmingly indicate that between 30 and 50 percent of all expatriate employees ultimately terminate their employment before their contract officially expires, with rates ranging from 25 to 40 percent when associated with a developed country to as high as 70 percent when associated with a developing country.

The cost of hiring and placing an expatriate in a foreign location can range from 50 to 200 percent of the expatriates salary. This calculation depends on a number of factors such as the amount of money spent on finding and hiring an expatriate, relocation costs to the foreign locale for the expatriate and his or her family as well as training about the local culture and other preparation costs. The total cost for American firms even in the first half of the 1990s was estimated to exceed \$ 2 billion annually (Punnett, 1997). The costs of failure are not only financial but also personal. Expatriates brought back early have a tendency to lose self-confidence and suffer from decreased motivation and morale. Other costs are the loss of productivity in the case of maladjustment to the new cultural

environment. Additional indirect costs include damage to customer relationships and contacts with host government officials and a negative impact on the morale of local staff. Thus, it is clear that organizations must consider how to more effectively select and train expatriates. They need to understand the psychological traits that impact adjustment to new cultural environments and acquisition of foreign languages.

Keeley (2014 & 2013) employed Kozai Group's Global Competency Inventory (GCI) in a quantitative study that demonstrated many of the psychological traits facilitate cross-cultural adjustment also facilitate foreign language ability. In the study, the GCI Self-confidence exhibited a very high correlation with the development of oral fluency in foreign languages. This trait or GCI competency is examined in detail in terms of how it facilitates cross-cultural adjustment and foreign language fluency, two critical human resource factors in global business.

Kozai Group's Global Competency Inventory's Self-Confidence Dimension¹

The level of personal belief in one's ability to achieve whatever one decides to accomplish, even if it is something that has never been tried before.

5-point Likert scale anchored with 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree"

Overall Scale Reliability = 0.83 – Cronbach's Alpha

Sample Questions:

- ✧ I can do almost anything if I apply myself
- ✧ I am comfortable setting high standards for myself.
- ✧ It is easy for me to deal with unexpected events.

(Note that some questions are reversed-coded in calculating the dimension score.)

Kozai Group's Description of the Self-Confidence (SC) Competency

Self-Confidence refers to the degree to which people have confidence in themselves and have a tendency to take action to overcome obstacles and master challenges. People high on this dimension believe that if they work hard enough and have the will power, they can learn what they need to learn in order to accomplish whatever they set out to do. Although people may be optimistic regarding cross-cultural situations, they may nevertheless lack the

¹ Details of Kozai Group's GCI is available at <http://kozaigroup.com/PDFs/GCI-Technical-Report-Dec%202008-1.pdf>

self-confidence to act positively on their optimism.

Self-confidence was noted by Kealey in his 1996 review as being an important competency “that is needed to be successful in another culture (p. 84).”

Similarly, other scholars have found self-confidence or self-efficacy to be important variables in intercultural effectiveness and adjustment.² In their meta-analyses of the expatriate adjustment literature, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) and Hechanova et al. (2003) found that self-efficacy was a significant predictor of expatriate adjustment.

Self-confidence relates to the Big Five personality dimension of extraversion, which, among other things, reflects an energetic approach toward the social and material world, sociability, and positive emotionality (John & Srivastava, 1999). Extraversion has been shown to empirically predict expatriate performance (Mol et al., 2005)

Additionally, self-confidence is related to the construct of locus of control, which refers to people’s beliefs regarding the degree to which they control events and outcomes that impact their lives, or whether external actors or processes primarily control such events and outcomes. The empirical literature indicates that individuals with an external locus of control exhibit significantly lower levels of expatriate adjustment and effectiveness than individuals who have an internal locus of control.³

High scorers almost always feel they can do anything if they study it out, work hard, and apply themselves. On the other hand, low scorers almost always believe that even if they study and work hard, they are not likely to be successful in their efforts.

Results for the GCI Self-Management Variable Self-Confidence

The 86 Chinese students were separated into 5 groups according to their relative performance ratings in ‘Japanese Ability’ (oral/aural communication).⁴ The participants also filled out a Chinese version of the GCI. The results of the ANOVA for Self-Confidence yielded an F Value of 32.666 (Sig.=0.000) between the

² Arthur & Bennett, 1995, 1997; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Gertsen, 1990; Goldsmith et al., 2003; Harrison et al., 2004; Hechanova et al., 2003; Jordan & Cartwright, 1998; Shaffer et al., 1999; Smith, 1996.

³ Dyal, 1984; Dyal, Rybensky, & Somers, 1988; Kuo, Gray, & Lin, 1976; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1992; 1993 a; 1993 b.

⁴ See Keeley (2013) for the method used to rate the students’ ‘Japanese Ability’.

‘Top17’ and ‘Bottom17’. Furthermore, the F Value for all five groups was 8.779 (Sig.=0.000). These high F Values confirm the validity of the correlation and difference of means analyses. Table 1 shows that the correlation between Self-Confidence scores and ‘Japanese Ability’ are significant for the ‘Top 17’ and ‘Bottom 17’ as well as for all 86 participants.

Table 1: Self Confidence & ‘Japanese Ability’ Correlation

Scale	Pearson Correlation	Significance (2-Tailed)	Subjects
Self-Confidence	0.712/0.490	0.000/0.000	34/86

Additionally, there is a significant difference between the mean of the ‘Top 17’ subgroup’s scores for Self-Confidence and that of the ‘Bottom 17’ subgroup as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Differences of Means for Self-Confidence Scores

Self-Confidence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Difference	Interval 95% Conf.
‘Top 17’	17	3.7861	0.2447	0.0593	0.000	0.5455	0.3511 to
‘Bottom 17’	17	3.2406	0.3082	0.0748			0.7399

Self-Confidence & Krashen’s View of Foreign Language Acquisition

Self-confidence is a determinant of the learner’s willingness to interact in the target language with native speakers. Lack of self-confidence is frequently related to the over-use of the ‘monitor’ in Krashen’s Monitor Hypothesis. In other words, when learners are not confident they will excessively monitor the correctness of their speech during a conversation to the detriment of their performance in terms of fluency. They may also practice avoidance by not expressing what they want to express because they are unsure of their ability. Krashen (1982) claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition.

Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to raise the affective filter and form a mental block that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is up it impedes language acquisition. Traits relating to self-confidence (lack of anxiety, outgoing personality, self-esteem) are thus predicted to relate to effective second language acquisition. Brown (1977) states, “Presumably, the person with high self-esteem is able to reach out beyond himself more freely, to be less inhibited, and

because of his ego strength, to make the necessary mistakes involved in language learning with less threat to his ego (p. 352).” In Krashen’s terms, the less self-confident person may understand the input but not acquire, just as the self-conscious person may filter (or avoid) in other domains.

Self-confidence or self-efficacy helps explain why people who possess similar knowledge and skills may differ widely in performance and behavior. In other words, how people behave is better predicted by their beliefs regarding their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of doing. Bandura (1997:3) pointed out that people guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy. Bandura asserts that beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency. He argues that if people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen. Conversely, if people believe they do have the power, they will make the attempt. In the case of foreign language acquisition, there are many challenges to one’s self-image since it is natural to make many mistakes in the first stages of the learning process. Thus, self-confidence or self-efficacy is an important component of the emotional resilience needed to reach high levels of fluency.

There are a number of additional studies that have demonstrated strong correlations between self-confidence or self-esteem and the development of proficiency in foreign languages. The conclusion is consistently that self-confidence and self-esteem are important affective variables in successful second language acquisition. For example, when Ehrman and Oxford (1995) investigated a number of factors, including age, which may affect the success of adults in achieving proficiency in speaking and reading in a foreign languages, they found that variables such as cognitive aptitude and beliefs about oneself were more strongly correlated with success than age. Heyde (1979) examined the effects of self-esteem on oral performance by American college students learning French as a foreign language. She demonstrated that self-esteem was positively correlated with the students’ scores in oral performance measures. In investigating language-learning strategies, Nunan (1997) found greater strategy use and self-efficacy among successful native-English-speaking learners of foreign languages. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) also revealed the importance of factors such as self-efficacy and willingness to communicate in another study.

Self-Confidence, Anxiety, and Oral Performance

Park and Lee (2005) investigated the relationships between foreign language

learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance in the target language among Korean students learning English. The factor analysis indicated that communication anxiety, criticism anxiety, and examination anxiety were the main components of anxiety, while situational confidence, communication confidence, language potential confidence and language ability confidence were the components of self-confidence for their group of students. The results also demonstrated significant effects of anxiety and self-confidence on the learners' oral performance. High anxiety was associated with low oral performance while high confidence corresponded to high oral performance. Confidence was more closely related with the learner attitude and interaction including communication strategies and social conversation skills. Anxiety was more negatively correlated with the learner's range of oral performance such as vocabulary and grammar. Though they did not mention the relationship between self-confidence and anxiety, research and experience both support the proposition that low self-confidence is associated with the probability of high anxiety when involved in oral communication in a foreign language.

Self-Confidence and Motivation

Expectancy theory is an important concept in current theories of motivation. It proposes that organisms anticipate events and that their behavior is thus guided by anticipatory goal states (Heckhausen, 1991). The higher the expectancy for a behavior to produce a specific outcome (e.g. learn and use a language), the greater tends to be the motivation. Bandura (1989) suggests that the most important expectancy is self-efficacy, referring to an individual's beliefs in his/her capacity to reach a certain level of performance or achievement. In language learning, this can be seen as self-confidence, which is an important variable in Clément's Social Context Model of L2 learning (Clément, 1980). Clément & Kruidenier (1985) propose that self-confidence is the most important determinant of motivation to learn and use the L2 in a multicultural setting. Although Gardner's model of motivation focuses on integrative motivation in foreign language acquisition, Gardner (2001) also maintains that there might be other factors that have direct effects on language achievement such as language learning strategies, language anxiety, and self-confidence with the language.

In general, self-confidence refers to the belief that a person has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals, or perform tasks completely. Clément, Gardner, and Smythe (1997) introduced the concept of self-confidence in the language

acquisition literature to describe a powerful mediating process in multi-ethnic settings that affects a person's motivation to learn and use the language of the other speech community (Dörnyei, 2005:273). Dörnyei asserts that Clément and his associates provided evidence that in communities where different language communities are present linguistic self-confidence that is derived from contact between the linguistic groups is a major motivational factor in learning the other community's language and determines the learner's future desire for intercultural communication and the extent of identification with the other language communities. In this context of Clément's observations, self-confidence is primarily a socially defined construct that may coexist with a cognitively based self-confidence derived from perceived proficiency in the target foreign languages used in communication with the other communities.

Self-Confidence-Locus of Control-Tolerance of Ambiguity

There can be an interaction between tolerance of ambiguity and locus of control: tolerance of ambiguity can be an important factor in learning styles, often interacting with the perceived locus of control. Learners who have high self-confidence and a feeling of being in control are more able to deal with the context in which the foreign language performance is taking place. On the other hand, learners who have low self-confidence may experience performance anxiety and permit negative effects of self-consciousness, such as over-monitoring of output, to block fluency and lead to a loss of train of thought and a lack of willingness to continue the interaction.

All contexts of foreign language performance can be seen as possessing characteristics that are either conducive or unfavorable to performance such as: inherent anxiety producing aspects, encouragement or discouragement aspects, engagement stimulation aspects, confidence building aspects, etc. Thus, the actual experience of self-confidence in the process of performance, such as having a conversation with a native speaker in the target language, may be viewed as having a cognitive-based confidence stemming from developed ability in the target language interacting with a confidence that is being socially constructed in the act of interaction. The development of the feeling of having an internal locus of control can be conceived as derived from gaining proficiency in the target language (cognitively derived confidence), as well as from social-interaction skills that promote socially constructed confidence.

In the ideal situation both cognitively based confidence and social-skill-based

confidence work together to induce positive confidence-building input from the person one is speaking with in the target language. Such confidence-building input may be explicit such as praise for one's ability in the target language and or implicit such as the native speaker not simplifying their speech (recognition that one is perceived to be proficient enough to understand). Personally, I find that when I am interacting in a foreign language and a native speaker of that language simplifies their speech I feel I must make a greater effort in order to preserve my self-confidence at that moment. In such a case I either directly ask them not to do so or indirectly seek to get them to speak normally by trying harder to appear as a competent speaker of their language. Having strategic vocabulary or phrases that indicate a sophisticated knowledge of the language and seeking to use them where appropriate facilitates the latter approach - it is often necessary to control the flow of the conversation to the extent that such appropriate opportunities are created. Additionally, making the utmost effort to mimic the accent and rhythm of the language often averts native speakers from using simplified speech.

Self-Confidence and Willingness to Communicate

Self-confidence or self-esteem is a key element of the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) model. The WTC model should be viewed as a dynamic model. Various factors quickly converge to exert an impact on the willingness to communicate in a matter of seconds (Ellis, 2007; MacIntyre, 2007). In other words, even as a foreign language is being used, the language learner's willingness to communicate fluctuates on an ongoing basis. The learner monitors his or her own speech and the reaction of the interlocutor(s) and thus the learner may suddenly abandon communication after making a mistake or when self-confidence suddenly dissipates. MacIntyre and Legatto (2010) contend that the situated approach of the pyramid model examines WTC as a state of mind, or a willingness to engage in conversation with a specific person at a specific moment, given a state of self-confidence as a communicator. The linguistic dimensions of prior learning combine with social and psychological aspects of language use to create WTC.

In WTC, as a dynamic system, there are changes over time wherein each state is partially dependent on the previous state. Linguistic, social, cognitive and emotional systems are interconnected to produce a particular level of WTC at any given moment. When there is harmony among these systems they function together to facilitate communication. However, in the case of interference between the systems, such as the absence of knowing how to express something

due to lack of vocabulary in the foreign language or uncertainty about grammar there may be a threat to self-efficacy resulting in the learner abandoning communication.

As mentioned above, one of the ways to maintain self-confidence and self-esteem is to learn to control the flow of the conversation within the bounds of the learner's capabilities in the foreign language. In doing so there is a greater possibility of positive feedback from the native-speaker reinforcing self-confidence in the language. Maintaining a healthy level of self-confidence in oral communication in foreign languages helps the learner fully utilize the knowledge that he or she has thus far obtained. Through employing confidence-building strategies in oral communication we can engender beneficial emotional states that support self-confidence and self-esteem (in other words use confidence to build confidence) and avoid negative emotional states, which when activated lead to poorer oral performance and less learning through conversational interaction.

We have just examined the dynamics of self-confidence and self-esteem in oral communication in a foreign language. We can also view self-confidence or self-esteem on three different levels: global, situational and task self-confidence. Global self-confidence is the general assessment of one's capabilities over time and across different situations. Situational self-confidence involves one's self-appraisal in regards to specific traits such as intelligence or ability to communicate with others, or in particular situations such as in education or work. Task self-confidence refers to one's assessment in particular tasks, and in the case of foreign languages it may relate to particular language skills such as listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. Situational and task self-confidence are the levels that are most actively involved in the dynamics of oral communication in a foreign language. As previously discussed, oral communication is the state in which the emotional or affective factors related to foreign language acquisition and use are most highly activated.

Global Self-Confidence

Global self-confidence is less dynamic or enduring and underpins one's language-learning self-image and the relationship between global, situational and task self-confidence. The maintenance of a global positive self-image is important to all types of learning. Learning may be viewed as a combination of emotional, social, and cognitive factors that impact a learners' self-image within a given context. While some people may have a high degree of situational self-confidence

and self-esteem in a particular field, they may feel totally inadequate in another field such as foreign language acquisition. I have often heard well-educated professionals who excel in their field of expertise say that they are poor at learning languages. With such a self-image they are setting themselves up for failure. However, this fear of failure in acquiring a foreign language is the main cause of their failure. It is a defensive mechanism to protect their global self-confidence by undermining any success they could achieve, given that they have already labeled themselves as 'poor at languages'. Basically, if they cannot excel in learning languages to the extent they excel in some other field then they prefer not to try lest the result have a negative impact on their global self-confidence.

Burns (1982:v-vi) noted that if learners start to perceive themselves as not capable of succeeding academically, they would almost certainly start having difficulties in their studies. Though successful experiences in the learning environment do not guarantee a positive self-concept as learners, it can be assumed that successful experiences do increase the possibility of developing self-confidence. On the other hand, Kash and Borich (1978:9) argue that unsuccessful experiences almost automatically lead to a negative academic self-concept and a negative self-concept in general. Thus, as a defensive mechanism, we see the development of the 'I am poor at languages syndrome' mentioned above. According to Laine (1988:10), an individual's self-concept is "a person's notions of himself as a foreign language learner" and it influences how learners view studying, and what they expect and demand from their language studies. Laine and Pihko (1991:15) stress the importance of the foreign language self-concept as a motivational force that directs learners' activities in language learning since learners' view of themselves as language learners determines the degree of their engagement in language learning.

Self-Identity, Self-Confidence, & Self-Esteem

What is the relationship between self-identity, self-confidence, and self-esteem? In general the terms, self-confidence and self-esteem are often used interchangeably when referring to how one feels about him/herself, though there are some important differences. Self-confidence is how you feel about your abilities and can vary from situation to situation. Self-esteem refers to how you feel about yourself overall and represents such factors as self-love and self-positive regard. You may have general high self-esteem, but low confidence about certain situations or abilities. Gaining self-confidence through positive experience

may increase self-esteem. In the research literature on second language acquisition or foreign language acquisition (SLA/FLA) there is use of both self-confidence and self-esteem. However, the discussion of self-esteem usually focuses upon the learner's self-esteem as a language learner. Since situation and ability are defined in such a case it is safe to say that we can accept certain conclusions for self-esteem to be valid for self-confidence.

According to self-esteem experts Dianne Fray and Jesse Carlock, "self-esteem is an evaluative term. It refers to negative, positive, neutral, and/or ambiguous judgments that one places on the self-concept. Self-esteem is an evaluation of the emotional, intellectual, and behavior aspects of self-concept."⁵ Thus, the link from self-esteem and self-identity is a value judgment. When involved in learning a foreign language you have an identity as a language learner. The evaluation of your language learning, which most likely is formed by your own perspective about your capabilities and performance as well as your perception of how others evaluate you, generates feelings with respect to your identity and either increases or decreases your self-esteem in that capacity. Positive judgments lead to high self-esteem as a language learner while negative judgments engender loss of self-esteem. Here, self-esteem as a language learner serves as a root for engendering self-confidence. When self-esteem as a language learner is high then the learner is most likely to feel high self-confidence when performing in a foreign language-learning situation. Likewise, low self-esteem sets the stage for low self-confidence. So we see self-esteem as a general disposition that affects self-confidence and also self-confidence affecting self-esteem.

There is a considerable amount of literature in the field of educational psychology focusing on the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. One of the main issues is whether self-esteem is a cause or an outcome of academic achievement. There is evidence that self-esteem influences achievement; and a positive correlation is found in many studies. Conversely, the results of other studies indicate that self-esteem is mainly an outcome of achievement. Perhaps it is true that high self-esteem sets the stage for expecting success in task-related performance and in such a case it is high self-esteem producing initial task-related self-confidence. Success in the task strengthens self-confidence related to the task and supports self-esteem. On the other hand, when self-esteem is low, there tends to be a lack of initial task-related self-confidence and poor performance is more likely when initial self-confidence is low. Poor

⁵ <http://www.stress-relief-tools.com/self-esteem-and-identity.html>, Accessed December 26, 2013.

performance on the task confirms or lessens the low self-confidence and has a negative effect on self-esteem.

The renowned philosopher and psychologist William James (1890) viewed self-esteem as the sum of our success divided by our pretensions, i.e., what we think we ought to achieve. This implies that self-esteem can be increased by achieving success and maintained by avoiding failure. James then argued that it could also be achieved and maintained by adopting less ambitious goals. However, learners often seek to defend their self-esteem by avoiding active engagement in the types of tasks and behavior that facilitate progress in learning a foreign language such as conversing with native speakers. The solution is to set realistic goals in the learning process that, when achieved, help build self-confidence and lead to higher self-esteem as a foreign language learner.

The Power of Expectations and Stereotypes on Performance

Expectations and stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies. People respond to social cues related to expectations of performance. In other words, you can be affected by people's expectations of you being good or lousy at something. This influence is related to how expectations affect self-confidence or self-esteem. Rosenthal demonstrated the experimenter expectancy effect in laboratory psychological experiments. The first laboratory demonstration (Rosenthal & Fode, 1963) involved psychology students in a learning and conditioning course who unknowingly became subjects of the experiment. One group of students were informed that they would be working with rats that had been specially bred for high intelligence, as measured by their ability to learn mazes quickly. The rest of the students were informed that they would be working with rats bred for dullness in learning mazes. After the students conditioned their rats to perform various skills, including maze learning, it was observed that the students who had been assigned the maze-bright rats reported significantly faster learning times than those reported by the students with the maze-dull rats. In reality, the students had all received randomly assigned standard lab rats. These students were not purposefully slanting their results; the influences they exerted on their animals were apparently unintentional and unconscious.

In order to investigate this effect in the classroom, Rosenthal cooperated with Jacobson, a principal of an elementary school in San Francisco. They gave an intelligence test to all the students at the beginning of the school year. Then, they randomly selected 20% of the students-without any relation to their test results-

and reported to the teachers that these students were showing “unusual potential for intellectual growth” and could be expected to “bloom” in their academic performance by the end of the year. Eight months later, at the end of the academic year, they came back and re-tested all the students. Those labeled as ‘intelligent’ children showed significantly greater increase in the new tests than the other children who were not singled out for the teachers’ attention. These results indicate that the change in the teachers’ expectations regarding the intellectual performance of these allegedly ‘special’ children had led to an actual change in the intellectual performance of these randomly selected children. In 1968 the results of the experiment were published in a book called *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupil’s Intellectual Development*. There are various possible explanations for these results. These include the special attention to the students labeled as ‘intelligent’ and the explicit and implicit messages from the teachers to the students communicating the belief in their abilities. This behavior promotes the students’ motivation, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Negative expectations and stereotypes can also affect performance. Steele and Aronson (1995) showed in several experiments that Black college freshmen and sophomores performed more poorly on standardized tests than White students when their race was emphasized. When race was not emphasized Black students performed better and equivalently with White students. Claude Steele and his colleagues labeled this the ‘stereotype threat’, which is the experience of anxiety and concern in a situation where a person has the potential to confirm a negative stereotype about their social group, ethnicity, gender, etc. Numerous studies have been carried out on the stereotype threat thereafter. Everyone is vulnerable to stereotype threat, at least in some circumstances. Stereotype effects have been demonstrated in a wide range of social groupings and stereotypes including, but not limited to: Whites with regard to appearing racist; students from low socioeconomic backgrounds compared to students from high socioeconomic backgrounds on intellectual tests; men compared to women on social sensitivity; Whites compared to Asian men in mathematics; Whites compared to Blacks and Hispanics on tasks assumed to reflect natural sports ability; and young girls whose gender has been highlighted before completing a math task.

The factors that may play a role in an individual’s ‘stereotype vulnerability’ include: group membership, domain identification, internal locus of control/proactive personality, and stereotype knowledge and belief, among others

(Aronson et al., 2002). Decreased performance in non-academic tasks includes white men in sports, women in negotiation, gay men in providing health care, women in driving, and elderly in memory performance. Stone (2002) points to the increased use of self-defeating strategies such as practicing less for a task and discounting the validity of the task or even the importance of the trait being tested. Although task discounting might help protect self-image from the consequences of poor performance, it can also potentially reduce motivation and lead a person to devalue the domain. Some of the mechanisms underlying the stereotype threat include: lowered performance expectations, physiological arousal or anxiety, reduced effort, reduced self-control, reduced working memory capacity, reduced flexibility and speed, and reduced creativity.

There are various techniques that can be used to reduce or eliminate stereotype threat effects. Creating awareness of possible negative effects is the first and most important step. Awareness of demographic factors such as gender and race along with mindfulness of their effects may reduce or eliminate the effects. Envisioning yourself as a complex, multi-faceted person may help you escape the stereotype traps. It is also helpful to engage in self-affirmation by reflecting upon your strengths and self-worth. The use of these techniques for eliminating or reducing the stereotype threat effects can directly or indirectly support a positive self-image as a speaker of the target foreign language(s) that you learn and use.

The Blue-Eyes Brown-Eyes Experiment

Third-grade teacher Jane Elliott wanted to teach her Riceville, Iowa class of all white students a lesson about discrimination the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968. She wanted the students to actually feel what it was like to be discriminated against on the basis of physical characteristics so she invented the 'Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes' game. In 1970, Elliott would come to national attention when ABC broadcast their *Eye of the Storm*, a documentary that filmed a later implementation of the experiment in action. When Elliott asked the students if they wanted to try the game the children became excited with anticipation so Elliott set the rules. Blue-eyed children must use a cup to drink from the fountain. Blue-eyed children must leave late to lunch and to recess. Blue-eyed children were not to speak to brown-eyed children. Blue-eyed children were troublemakers and slow learners.

Within 15 minutes, Elliott says, she observed her brown-eyed students

morph into youthful supremacists and blue-eyed children become uncertain and intimidated. Brown-eyed children became domineering, arrogant, judgmental, and cold. All of a sudden, disabled brown-eyed readers were reading. At first she thought that what she was observing was not possible, that it was all her imagination. Then she watched bright, blue-eyed kids become stupid, frightened, frustrated, angry, resentful, and distrustful. It was absolutely the strangest thing she had ever experienced. The next day she reversed the roles; the blue-eyed students were proclaimed to be superior. A spelling test given on both days revealed that the children did significantly better on the day that their group was declared superior. Forty years later Jane Elliot is still using the blue eyes/brown eyes exercise and travelling the world teaching and lecturing.

Self-Esteem and Its Effect on Learning from Mistakes

In this case of Elliot's students we have an authority figure manipulating the self-image, the self-esteem, and the self-confidence of children who have a less well-developed self-image. However, adults also conform to expectations as we have seen in the discussion above concerning the power of stereotypes and expectations. These observations are further reinforced by an experiment that Bengtsson et al. (2011) carried out with college students. They studied how priming for self-esteem influences the monitoring of one's own performance. Social cues have subtle effects on us, often without our being aware of them. One explanation for this influence involves implicit priming of trait associations.

In order to study this effect, Bengtsson and her research associates activated implicit associations in the participants of 'being clever' or 'being stupid' that were task relevant, and studied its behavioral impact on an independent cognitive task (the n-back task, which is a continuous performance task that is commonly used as an assessment in cognitive neuroscience). Activating a representation of 'clever' caused participants to slow their reaction times after errors on the working memory task, while the reverse pattern was seen for associations to 'stupid'. Critically, these behavioral effects were absent in control conditions. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), they show that the neural basis of this effect involves the anterior paracingulate cortex (area 32) where activity tracked the observed behavioral pattern, increasing its activity during error monitoring in the 'clever' condition and decreasing in the 'stupid' condition. The data provide a quantitative demonstration of how implicit cues, which specifically target a person's self-concept, influences the way we react to our own

behavior and point to the anterior paracingulate cortex as a critical cortical locus for mediating these self-concept related behavioral regulations.

Bengtsson and her colleagues showed that participants' brains were acting differently when they made a mistake, according to whether they had been primed with the word 'clever' or with the word 'stupid'. When they were primed with the word 'clever' and then made an error, there was enhanced activity in the medial prefrontal cortex. This increased activity was not seen after people gave a correct answer. However, importantly, it was also not seen when the subjects had been primed with the word stupid. The frontal lobes of the brain are involved in multiple high-level processes, one of which is executive functions. Identifying future goals and recognizing the actions that will lead to achieving those goals are important executive functions. Priming with the word 'clever' can increase self-confidence or self-esteem. The activity observed in this experiment when primed with 'clever' appears to correspond with the motivation to and actual action of 'learning from mistakes'. If you are 'clever' then you learn from your mistakes, while if you are 'stupid' then mistakes are natural and any effort to learn from them seems to be a useless endeavor. The motivation to do well leads to treating errors as being in conflict with one's ideals for oneself.

Concluding Remarks

The ability to function at high levels in cross-cultural environments and acquire ability in the language of the host country in the case of extended sojourns abroad are important success factors in international business. The quantitative study carried out by Keeley (2013, 2014) demonstrated that there is a strong link between the psychological traits that facilitate cross-cultural adaptation or adjustment and those that facilitate fluency in foreign languages. Self-confidence is one of the most important of these psychological traits and the multiple aspects of self-confidence have been explored in this paper.

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