

Induction and Reflection: A Study of Acculturation Model in Second Language Acquisition in the Past Decade

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Abstract

Acculturation Model, as a conceptual framework which permits the interpretation and understanding of success or failure in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in various contact settings, sheds light on English teaching. After summarizing, the author found that the research on Acculturation Model in the globe still has the following inadequacies: inadequate expansion of research objects, inadequate efficiency of research methods, and limited extension of research perspectives. In the future, great efforts should be made to further develop the theory and practice of Acculturation Model in order to improve teaching quality.

Keywords

Acculturation Model, Second Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) usually refers to any other language learning after the acquisition of the native language. As a model of SLA, Acculturation Model predicts that learners will acquire the target language (TL) to the degree they acculturate to the target language group. It maintains that certain social and psychological variables cluster into a single variable, acculturation (Schumann, 1986). As more attention is paid to the quality of “learning” in teaching and learning, it shows that Acculturation Model are a weighty part of SLA research.

In this paper, the author will sort out the research on Acculturation Model in second language acquisition from home and abroad from 2010 to 2020, classifying the achieved results into categories, and try to affirm the existing results,

identify existing problems, reflect on improvement, and looking forward to the future from the review. The literature for this paper is derived from 17 journals¹.

2. Trends in Research on Second Language Acquisition and Acculturation Model from 2010 to 2020

Based on CNKI research engine, the author searched a total of 25 articles in China. Among them, 2 articles in 2010, 2 articles in 2011, 1 article in 2012, 5 articles in 2013, 2 articles in 2015, 3 articles in 2016, 5 articles in 2018, 3 articles in 2019, 2 articles in 2020 (as shown in **Figure 1**). It can be seen that Chinese scholars pay limited attention to the field of Acculturation Model. The research in this field started late, and the research perspective is limited.

Based on International research engine, the author searched a total of 5330 articles abroad. The annual trend of attention is shown in **Figure 2**. It can be seen that although the research interest in Acculturation Model has slightly decreased abroad, it has always been at a relatively stable level.

In this paper, 17 domestic and foreign papers on Acculturation Model and Second Language Acquisition published between 2010 and 2020 will be taken as the object of analysis. The published papers will be classified into two categories: theoretical research and empirical research, followed by secondary classification according to three aspects: research direction, research object and research method. The comprehensive analysis results are as follows.

2.1. Research Direction

Among the 17 papers, there are 9 theoretical research papers, accounting for about 53% of the total, and 8 empirical research papers, accounting for about 47% of the total.

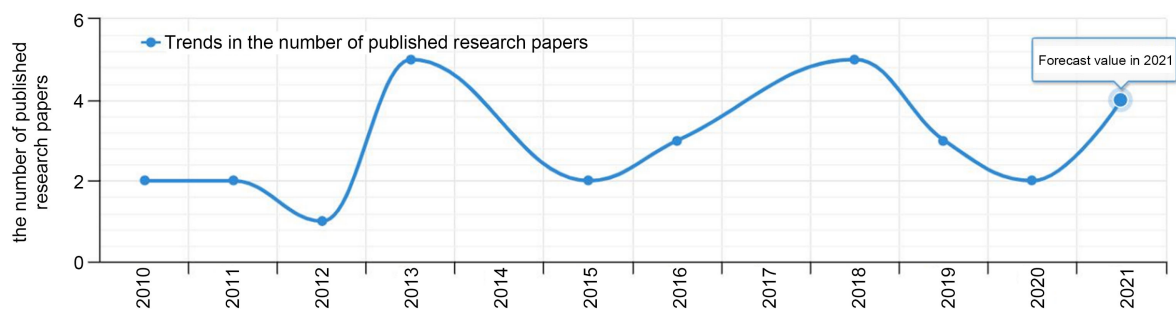


Figure 1. Trends in the number of published research papers on Second Language Acquisition and Acculturation Model between 2010 and 2020 in China.

¹The papers published in 17 journals in China include: *Advances in Asian Social*, *Journal of Language Studies*, *Indonesian EFL Journal*, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, *English Language Teaching*, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *Journal of Guangzhou University (Social Science Edition)*, *China Vocational and Technical Education* (2020), *Xinjiang Social Sciences* (2017), *China University Science and Technology* (2019), *Journal of Minzu University of China (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, *China Electric Power Education*, *Journal of Zaozhuang University*, *Journal of Hubei University of Science and Technology*, *Language and Translation*.

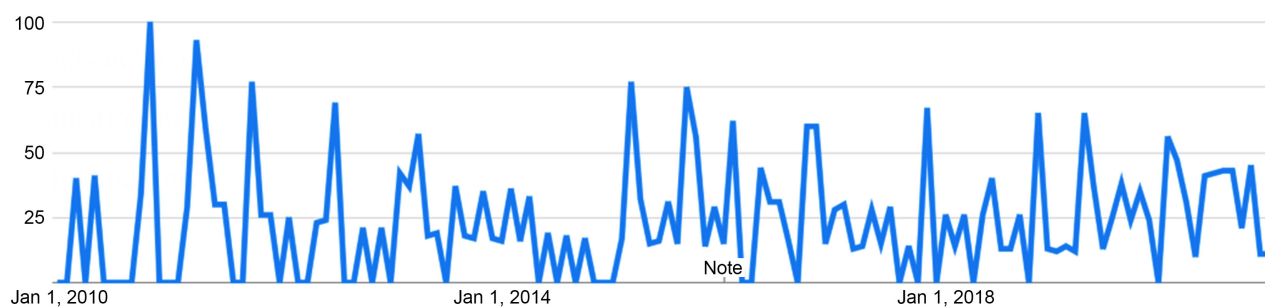


Figure 2. Trends in the number of published research papers on Second Language Acquisition and Acculturation Model between 2010 and 2020 abroad.

2.2. Research Object

Among 8 empirical research papers, 2 studies were conducted on English-speaking Chinese; 1 on Chinese-speaking Chinese minority people; 2 on Chinese-speaking foreigners; 1 on English-speaking Iranians; 1 on English-speaking Arabs; and 1 on Arabic-speaking English-speaking country people.

2.3. Research Method

Among 8 empirical research papers, 3 of them adopted quantitative research method; 5 papers were conducted by the method of combining quantitative and qualitative research (such as questionnaire combined with interview, questionnaire combined with field investigation, questionnaire combined with qualitative longitudinal study).

3. Analysis of Research Results

The author classifies the literature by the criteria of theoretical and empirical studies and then analyzes the results as follows.

3.1. Theoretical Studies

There are 9 theoretical studies, followed by the following classification.

3.1.1. Theoretical Evaluation of the Model

Barjesteh and Vaseghi (2012), by conducting a multidimensional summary of the Acculturation Model, assessed the following shortcomings: first, there remain some unanswered questions with the model; second, it deliberately excludes other potentially important variables (such as cognitive and instructional factors) in SLA. Third, theory received limited empirical support. Zaker (2016) makes a similar point to the previous one, but further points out that the cultural adaptation model has two additional shortcomings: first, this model argues that that instruction has no important role in SLA; second, social factors are assumed to have a direct impact on SLA while they are more likely to have an indirect one. Lian and Zhan (2017) argue that the model has the following shortcomings: first, the language learning behaviors performed by foreign language learners in non-natural language settings (e.g., classrooms) is weakened; second, the “social

distance” and “psychological distance” proposed by the theory are abstract concepts, which are difficult to measure. Third, the “cultural distance” and “language type distance” of language learners are ignored. Jia (2013) argues that the process of acculturation does not, and indeed cannot, explain the process of internalization and use of second language knowledge.

3.1.2. Practical Evaluation of the Model

There are five papers in this category. Tian (2013) pointed out that in the process of learning English, Chinese students are objectively limited by their cultural background which is beyond their own ability to change, the limitations including: the environment, the differences between the native language repertoire and culture, and the differences between the meaning connotation and the emotion connotation theories of language; Zhou and Huang (2020) summarized the effective conceptions and methods of acculturation by analyzing the current dilemma of international students’ education in higher education institutions, i.e., to make international students identify with China emotionally and to make international students support China in action, and then elaborated on the path to achieve it. Cui and Shen (2019) believe that the theory of “cross-cultural language socialization” proposed in the book *Research on Cross-cultural Language Socialization of International Students in China* has practical significance. Chen and Liu (2010) argue that the social factors of second language acquisition in the foreign language teaching environment in China are largely favorable, but there are still some unfavorable factors. It is suggested that we create a good foreign language learning environment according to the cultural adaptation model. For example, by creating an authentic classroom environment, using local associations in the target language, and developing international exchange and cooperation programs. Xu (2013) emphasizes the importance of social factors and psychological factors, and stresses that university English teachers focus on developing students’ cross-cultural awareness and motivating them to learn and identify with English culture. This can be achieved through the following methods: first, helping students to understand the culture and customs of the target language countries to build their favorable feelings towards the target language countries and cultures; second, making full use of foreign teachers’ resources; third, exploring and cultivating students’ interests and favorable feelings towards the target language societies from their own interests to create a strong desire for them; fourth, vigorously developing the second classroom of foreign languages.

3.2. Empirical Studies

There are 8 theoretical studies, followed by the following classification.

3.2.1. Current Situation

There is one article in this category. Yang (2013) investigated the current situation of cross-cultural adaptation among international students in China and the relationship between Chinese language teaching and cross-cultural accultura-

tion. The survey results showed that the differences in cultural background and Chinese language proficiency affect students' acculturation to Chinese culture and make them present more complicated characteristics; although Chinese language teaching is closely related to intercultural acculturation and teaching is an important way to cultivate students' intercultural acculturation ability, students are not satisfied with the teaching effect, and the intercultural knowledge they get from it is limited.

3.2.2. Social Factor or Psychological Factor

There are three articles in this category. [Tamimi Sa'd and Khameneh \(2015\)](#) explored the role of Iranian male elementary school EFL learners' attitudes and beliefs on the learners' adoption of native language (MT) or target language (i.e., English) accent when speaking English in a foreign language teaching environment. It was found that 81.3% of the participants responded affirmatively concerning the target language accent, only 18.7% responded that they would preserve their L1 accent. The main reason for their preference for native-like accent was Intelligibility, while the reasons for their preference for L1 accent included: the revelation of one's identity through one's MT accent and the limited importance of accent. [Gao \(2017\)](#) explored the effects of social factor and psychological factor on the acquisition of Chinese as a second language with international students in China as the study subjects. The following conclusions were verified: First, the farther the social distance between Korean students and Chinese students, the less contact they have, the more unfavorable it is for them to learn Chinese as a second language. Second, the closer the psychological distance is, the more language input will be, and the Third, social distance is more important than psychological distance in the acculturation process of students from different countries studying in Xi'an. Fourth, the higher the level of Chinese learning, the The acculturation degree is related to the level of Chinese learning. Fifth, the stronger the acculturation degree of international students in Xi'an Fanyi University, the easier it is to adapt to the environment of Chinese students, the higher the level of learning Chinese. [Al-Qahtani \(2016\)](#) explored the social distance of living in the Arab community in the United States and the effect of social distance on the process of learning/acquiring English as a second language (ESL). The study found that different Arabs acculturate in different ways depending on their future plans. Those who intend to reside in the TL culture adapt more easily (perceived less distance from the TL group) than temporary residents who intend to live there for a specific purpose and leave after completing their careers. Permanent residents have higher self-perceptions of their English proficiency than temporary residents.

3.2.3. Preservation

There is one article in this category. [Yang \(2012\)](#) sampled undergraduate students of Applied English in Taiwan region, China, and found that the preservation variable, which is a component of Acculturation Model, contributed signif-

icantly to predicting foreign language anxiety. Increased cultural preservation can result in reduced contact with the TL group and greater social distance, which exacerbated FL anxiety.

3.2.4. English Proficiency

There is one article in this category. *Jia et al. (2016)* explored the interrelationship between English proficiency and acculturation by sampling adolescents living in an urban area in southern Ontario, Canada. Finding that learning English may be an important variable influencing immigrant youths' motivation for cultural immersion. Plus, scores on tests of English proficiency (i.e. reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency) and mainstream acculturation were positively and reciprocally related to each other for Chinese adolescents who were immigrants to Canada.

3.2.5. Teaching Model

There is one article in this category. *Yu (2018)* examined students' explicit and implicit attitudes toward both Mongolian and Chinese languages in Inner Mongolia who received different teaching modes. It was found that students in the Type I mode (Mongolian-medium, plus Chinese) had a high preference for both Mongolian and Chinese, and showed a clear preference for Mongolian in their implicit attitudes; students in the Type II mode (Chinese-medium, plus Mongolian) were well integrated into the national linguistic environment, although their own language was to some extent regressed. The results indicate that these two groups of students are in a relatively good state of acculturation.

3.2.6. Demographic Variables

There is one article in this category. *Abdelhalim and Alqubayshi (2020)* explored the effect of various factors on the linguistic acculturation strategies adopted by second language learners in a sample of bilingual English-speaking female adults learning Arabic as a second language in Saudi Arabia. The results found that only age and nationality had statistically significant effects on the level of linguistic acculturation.

4. Limitation of the Current Studies

The previous research results on Acculturation Model in Second Language Acquisition are quite fruitful, but there are also some inadequacies.

In general, there is a need for improvement in the following areas.

1) The research subjects need to be expanded. From the international literature, most of the research subjects in the existing literature focus on Asia (China, Korea), Europe (UK), North America (USA, Canada) and the Middle East (Iran, Arabia), and there are fewer Acculturation Model studies on African and South American populations; From the domestic literature, most of the existing literature takes Chinese as the MT and English as the SL as the research object, but rarely takes Chinese as the SL and minority languages as the MT as the research object.

2) Research methods need to be improved. Both purely qualitative studies and purely quantitative studies were found to be less common in both national and international literature (only 62%). Both purely qualitative studies and purely quantitative studies are difficult to dig deeper into the research questions; therefore, the literature needs to be improved in terms of the scientific nature of the research methods.

3) Research perspectives need to be enriched. The existing domestic and international literature focuses on six variables (current situation, social factor or psychological factor, preservation, English proficiency, teaching model, demographic variables). There are few studies on the correlation between new variables and Acculturation Model.

In specific, by comparing domestic and foreign studies, we can find that the study of Acculturation Model in domestic second language acquisition is relatively slow, the number of literature is very small compared with foreign countries, and the research is relatively not systematic.

5. Issues Worthy of Research in the Future

Although the research on Acculturation Model in second language acquisition in China has been flourishing in recent years, some aspects of the research are still not deep enough, and the issues worthy of consideration in the future are analyzed as follows.

1) What kind of factors can be added to the Acculturation Model from other perspectives (Such as cognitive factors, instructional factors) to enrich the theory?

2) What is the acculturation situation of L2 learners in Africa and South America? Is the relationship between social distance, psychological distance and acculturation in Africa and South America consistent with the Acculturation Model?

3) In addition to the variables that have been studied, are other variables (such as classroom instruction) related to the level of acculturation?

4) Does social factor have a direct or indirect impact on the level of acculturation? Is there any mediating variable in the influence path?

5) How to measure the social distance and psychological distance of L2 learners?

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the research results of the literature on Acculturation Model in Second Language Acquisition in globe from 2010 to 2020 were reviewed, and reflections revealed that there are still inadequacies in the results of current research, such as inadequate expansion of research objects, inadequate efficiency of research methods, and limited extension of research perspectives. The study also provides a brief analysis of the issues worthy of consideration in the future.

In order to combine the characteristics of Acculturation Model with the practicality of teaching and to make it better fit the needs of classroom in China,

there is still room for development in the field, which still needs generations of scholars to explore and actively contribute to inject new vitality and vigor into the research of Acculturation Model.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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