

Original Paper

A Study on the Cognition-Affect-Behavior Interaction of
Non-Native Speakers from the Perspective of Sociocultural
Theory: Affect Construction in English Debating Through the
Lens of Dramatic Events

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Received: December 12, 2025 Accepted: February 22, 2026 Online Published: March 12, 2026

doi:10.22158/eltls.v8n2p11

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v8n2p11>

Abstract

Framed by Sociocultural Theory (SCT), this study focuses on the context of British Parliamentary (BP) English Debate, adopts a narrative-oriented interpretative case study paradigm, and explores how the affective experiences of non-native English speakers in BP English Debate are triggered by dramatic events and guide their interactive development of cognition, affect and behavior; through video recording and semi-structured interviews. The participants are 8 English major students (4 core interviewees), all with one year of debating experience and an English proficiency of Level B2 or above.

This study identifies six core types of dramatic events and three social interaction mediation paths, and reveals the differentiated interactive development trajectories of the four learners: cognitive reconstruction under social support, cognitive expansion driven by affective deepening, metacognitive awakening triggered by accumulated frustration, and strategy construction under the balance of affective tension. The study confirms that affect is not an isolated psychological response, but a core mediator constructed and regulated in social interaction that drives second language development. This study provides empirical evidence for the affective mediation mechanism to supplement Sociocultural Theory, enriches the process-oriented analytical perspective of second language affect research, and offers practical references for the optimization of English debate teaching and second language writing teaching.

Keywords

Sociocultural Theory, English Debate, Dramatic Events, Affect Construction, Cognition-Affect-Behavior Interaction

1. Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), Sociocultural Theory (SCT) emphasizes that language development originates from the internalization process of social interaction, and places the dynamic relationship between learners and the sociocultural environment at the core (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). As a core product of the interaction between individuals and the social environment, the role of affect in second language development has received increasing academic attention, yet there are still obvious gaps in relevant research (Qin et al., 2022). As an internationally accepted debate format, British Parliamentary (BP) Debate is characterized by fixed role division, clear evaluation and feedback mechanisms, and continuous social interaction. This format requires debaters to complete argument construction, refutation and response within a limited time. Its high-intensity interactivity and competitiveness provide a unique and authentic research context for exploring affect construction in social interaction, and the critical thinking skills cultivated in it can be transferred to English writing. However, existing studies mostly focus on the overall impact of debate on language or critical thinking ability, ignoring the mediating role of affect; although SLA affect research has shown a sociocultural turn, it lacks a clear definition of the specific carrier of affect construction; studies on the transfer between debate and writing focus on cognitive strategies, and fail to pay attention to the screening and driving functions of affect.

This study selects Sociocultural Theory as the framework, and its rationality lies in that the theory breaks through the individualistic perspective, emphasizes the socially constructed nature of affect, and provides an appropriate perspective for analyzing the relationship between affect and cognition-behavior in interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Taking “dramatic events” as the core unit of analysis is because, as the nodes of affective fluctuation subjectively perceived by learners (Swain, 2013), they can accurately capture the specific process of affect construction. The fixed role division and feedback mechanism of BP Debate further guarantee the authenticity of social interaction and the uniqueness of the research context (Trapp, 2016).

The core research question of this study is: Under the framework of Sociocultural Theory, how are the “affective experiences” of non-native English speakers in BP English Debate triggered by “dramatic events” and guide the interactive development of their cognition, affect and behavior? The theoretical significance of this study is to provide empirical support for the affective mediation mechanism of Sociocultural Theory, and the practical significance is to provide precise intervention paths for debate and writing teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Application of Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Acquisition

Sociocultural Theory originates from Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology, whose core view is that the development of human higher cognitive functions depends on social interaction and the mediation of cultural tools. Its core concepts include mediation theory (other-mediation, object-mediation, self-mediation), Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and internalization, among which mediation theory provides a specific path for analyzing the role of the social environment in individual language development (Lantolf, 2000).

In SLA research, the application of SCT has shifted from theoretical introduction to empirical exploration. Based on SCT, Qin and Dai constructed an "ecological" task-based teaching model, confirming the fundamental role of social interaction in language development; Lantolf and Poehner revealed the mediating value of social support in ZPD for second language proficiency through dynamic assessment research (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014); Qin et al. confirmed the importance of cultural tools in mediating learners' cognition and affect (Qin et al., 2021).

2.2 Multidimensional Perspectives of Second Language Affect Research

Second language affect research has undergone a development from the traditional psychological perspective, to the positive psychology perspective, and then to the sociocultural perspective. The traditional psychological perspective regards affect as an internal attribute of individuals, focuses on the interfering effect of negative affect such as anxiety (Scovel, 1978; Krashen, 1985), but ignores the dynamic and social nature of affect; the positive psychology perspective emphasizes the broaden-and-build function of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), although it recognizes the functional value of affect, it still does not break away from the individualistic framework and only regards the social environment as an external influencing factor.

Affect research from the sociocultural perspective has achieved a theoretical breakthrough, emphasizing that affect is the dialectical unity of individual psychological phenomenon and social construction (Vygotsky, 1994). The concept of *perezhivanie* (affective experience) in SCT compares affect to a prism connecting the individual and the environment, holding that different learners have different affective perceptions of the same environment and these perceptions affect their development trajectories (Fleer et al., 2017); the second language "investment" theory combines affect with social factors such as ideology, identity and capital, and explores the impact of affect on language learning in the ecosystem (Norton, 1995; Darwin & Norton, 2015).

2.3 Research on English Debate and Second Language Proficiency Development

As a high-intensity interactive language activity, English debate has been proven to promote second language development in many aspects. Empirical research by Liu and Jin shows that English debate training can significantly improve learners' ability of interpretation, analysis, inference and evaluation; Liu and Jin found that English debate can enhance the logic and persuasiveness of college students' critical thinking; Wang et al. pointed out that the role coordination mechanism of BP Debate has a

positive effect on SLA and the cultivation of critical thinking ability.

The core characteristics of BP Debate include fixed role division (Prime Minister/Leader of Opposition/Deputy Prime Minister/Deputy Leader of Opposition/Member for the Government/Member for the Opposition/Government Whip/Opposition Whip), fixed speaking order (PM→LO→DPM→DLO→MG→MO→GW→OW), 15-minute unified preparation time, 7-minute impromptu speech and Point of Information (POI) session for each debater, clear judge evaluation and feedback mechanism, as well as fixed partner and senior mentor relationships formed in training (Wang, et al., 2013). Its high-intensity interactivity and feedback cycle provide an authentic context for the generation and development of affective experience. In terms of research on relevant proficiency transfer, existing achievements mostly focus on the cognitive strategy level (such as argumentation framework and logical structure).

Taken together, we argue that there are three core gaps in existing research: First, although SLA research from the perspective of Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction, it lacks sufficient discussion on the specific mechanism of affect as a development mediator, and fails to clarify the trigger carrier and regulation path of affect construction. Second, although second language affect research has shown a sociocultural turn, it mostly focuses on broad environmental factors and pays insufficient attention to the affective trigger effect of dramatic events in specific language activities. Third, research on English debate and second language development mostly focuses on the cognitive and language proficiency level, ignoring the core role of affect in proficiency development and cross-context transfer, and insufficiently exploring the unique value of BP Debate.

Based on this, this study takes BP English Debate as the context, takes dramatic events as the core unit of analysis, and based on the framework of Sociocultural Theory, explores how the affective experience of non-native speakers is triggered by dramatic events and guides the interactive development of cognition-affect-behavior. This study not only fills the gaps in existing research, but also provides empirical support for the integration of affect and social interaction for Sociocultural Theory, as well as references for relevant teaching practice.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Paradigm and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a narrative-oriented interpretative case study paradigm. The narrative approach can accurately capture learners' subjective experience and meaning construction process in language learning (Swain et al., 2015), which is highly consistent with the core of this study focusing on "the social construction of affective experience", and helps to in-depth present the dynamic interaction trajectory of learners' cognition-affect-behavior in the specific context of English debate.

The theoretical framework of this study is Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and the view of affect as a social construction. The core concepts of SCT (mediation theory, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), internalization, etc.) provide a core perspective for analyzing the dialectical relationship between social

interaction and individual affective development (Lantolf & Swain, 2019), and can effectively explain how affect is regulated and constructed in social interaction and promotes cognitive and behavioral development; the view of affect as a social construction breaks through the limitations of individualism, emphasizing that affect is not an isolated psychological response, but a dynamic process formed in the interaction with others and cultural tools, whose meaning and function originate from learners' subjective interpretation and social context (Prior, 2019). The combination of the two provides a complete theoretical support for exploring the internal correlation between dramatic events, affective experience and cognition-affect-behavior interaction.

3.2 Core Unit of Analysis and Research Participants

3.2.1 Core Unit of Analysis

The core unit of analysis of this study is dramatic events, whose operational definition is: social interaction events in BP English Debate practice that are subjectively perceived by learners as nodes of significant emotional fluctuation, and have traceable impact on their subsequent language behavior, self-cognition or learning strategies (Veresov, 2019). The determination of events is based on learners' interview narratives as the core basis, rather than researchers' objective observation. The initial reference types include refutation of views in debate, language expression difficulties, preemption of views, recognition obtained, etc., and the final result is subject to data analysis.

3.2.2 Research Participants

The participants are 8 non-native English learners participating in BP English Debate, all of whom are English major students in a university, with one year of debate participation experience, and their English proficiency has been verified by the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to reach Level B2 or above, with the language foundation for debate activities. Among them, 4 learners participated in the semi-structured interviews, all voluntarily participating in the entire data collection process (including debate video recording and interviews). The reasons for selecting this group are: the English major background and one year of debate experience ensure their familiarity with debate tasks, and their identity as non-native English speakers makes them face the dual challenges of language expression and critical thinking construction in debate, with richer and more research-worthy affective experiences.

3.3 Research Context

The research context is a complete BP English Debate, which strictly follows the internationally accepted competition rules: the debate is divided into two sides (Government & Opposition), each side includes upper and lower houses, with a total of four teams, 2 people per team, and a total of 8 debaters in the whole debate; the unified preparation time is 15 minutes, during which internal team discussions can be carried out; after the preparation, the debaters give a 7-minute impromptu speech in a fixed order (Prime Minister PM→Leader of Opposition LO→Deputy Prime Minister DPM→Deputy Leader of Opposition DLO→Member for the Government MG→Member for the Opposition MO→Government Whip GW→Opposition Whip OW), during the speech, they can accept Points of

Information (POI) from the opposing debaters; after the debate, professional judges provide oral feedback and give the ranking of the four teams. The core characteristics of this context are high-intensity social interaction, limited time pressure and impromptu expression requirements, which provide a natural and authentic research field for the generation, regulation and transformation of affective experience.

3.4 Data Collection Scheme

To accurately capture the core research questions, this study adopts a multi-source data complementary collection method, as follows:

Video Recording: The whole process of a complete BP English Debate is recorded, focusing on key links such as debaters' speeches, inquiry interactions, and team discussions, to provide an objective basis for restoring the occurrence context of dramatic events and supplementing the details of interview narratives.

Semi-structured Interviews: Based on the preliminary observation results of the debate video, semi-structured interviews are conducted with 4 core learners, and the stimulated recall method is adopted. By playing back key clips in the debate video, learners are guided to describe in detail the source of affective experience, the specific role of social interaction, and subsequent cognitive and behavioral changes. Each interview lasts 30-40 minutes, and the interview recordings are transcribed verbatim to form text materials, with a total of about 40,000 words of interview text collected.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Based on the core logic of the narrative approach, combined with the event-oriented analysis idea, this study carries out data interpretation, and the specific steps are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Analysis Procedure

Step No.	Step Name	Core Operation Content
<i>Step 1</i>	Identification of Dramatic Events	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extract "high emotional intensity events" with "strong emotions" explicitly described by learners from the interview text 2. Conduct cross-validation combined with the contextual details of the debate video 3. Eliminate instantaneous emotional events without subsequent impact, and determine the core dramatic

		events
		4. Complete preliminary classification according to event types
<i>Step 2</i>	Intra-event Narrative Analysis (Micro Level)	<p>Conduct in-depth narrative interpretation of each core event, focusing on three aspects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affective experience presented in learners' narratives (emotion type, intensity, fluctuation process) 2. Social interactions that regulate the generation of affect (teammate collaboration, opponent inquiry, judge feedback, etc.) 3. Learners' subjective meaning construction and interpretation of the event
<i>Step 3</i>	Post-event Development Trajectory Analysis (Process Level)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track the dynamic changes of learners after the event: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> ① Cognitive changes (adjustment of self-ability cognition, reconstruction of learning goals, etc.) ② Behavioral adjustment (changes in debate strategies, changes in subsequent expression styles, etc.) 2. Combined with the ZPD and internalization concepts of Sociocultural Theory, analyze how social support promotes the transformation of affect into cognition and behavior

<i>Step 4</i>	Cross-case Comparison	Narrative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare the differences of the 4 learners in the type of affective response, cognitive transformation path, and behavioral adjustment mode 2. Summarize the differentiated modes of cognition-affect-behavior interaction 3. Reveal the key factors affecting the effect of affect construction
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During the data analysis, the focus is on the affective expression, meaning interpretation and behavior description in learners' narratives. Through repeated reading of interview texts and video materials, the consistency between the analysis results and the original data is ensured, and the dynamic construction process of affective experience in social interaction is fully presented.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Types, Affective Responses, and Social Interaction Triggers of Dramatic Events

Based on the cross-validation analysis of interview transcripts and debate video recordings, this study identifies six core types of dramatic events from learners' subjective narratives. Different types of events correspond to differentiated affective triggering logics, affective response patterns, and social interaction regulation mechanisms, serving as the core nodes for the interactive development of learners' cognition, affect, and behavior. The specific definitions and learners' original narrative interpretations are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Types, Affective Responses, and Social Interaction Triggers of Dramatic Events

Type	Definition	Interpretation (Respondents' Original Words)
<i>Unmet Expectation or Failure Events</i>	Initially trigger strong individual negative affect (sadness, confusion), whose affective repair and cognitive transformation depend on the social support network such as	P3: "I was extremely upset at that moment, really devastated... I received so much care and encouragement from others... I was sad at first, but then I gradually felt

	<p>the team and mentors, and finally turn to constructive reflection</p>	<p>more and more like crying, and I was overwhelmed with gratitude the whole time”;</p> <p>P4: “We thought we performed very well, but got a very poor ranking, which actually happened during team training... When the result does not match your expectation, review can definitely bring us a lot of things”</p>
<p><i>View Refutation or Challenge Events</i></p>	<p>The affective trajectory shifts from defensive admiration and panic to active learning, the core turning point is reconstructing the recognition of others’ ability into learnable goals, relying on personal review or partner collaboration to achieve cognitive processing</p>	<p>P4: “Wow, the opponent was so amazing... After the debate, during the review, I thought that actually this was just because I was not well prepared enough”;</p> <p>P2: “I was a little bit upset and confused... I immediately wrote to my partner, confirmed with him that what we said was consistent, and then resolved the misunderstanding from the opponent”</p>
<p><i>Role or Position Change Events</i></p>	<p>Trigger tension and anxiety due to situational uncertainty, the affective intensity is inversely proportional to the degree of preparation, and the sense of control over the situation needs to be rebuilt through in-depth collaboration with the partner</p>	<p>P1: “Because we are recording the video today, and I haven’t played the member role for two months, also Teacher Kaikai and my mentor are here, I felt extremely nervous”;</p> <p>P1: “I will try my best to talk to my partner about things I can’t think of... We will have</p>

			more in-depth communication backstage”
<i>Language Dilemma Events</i>	<i>Expression</i>	Generally trigger frustration and anxiety, and subsequently differentiate into immediate instrumental strategies (writing verbatim scripts, on-the-spot replacement) and long-term ability accumulation strategies (vocabulary expansion, special training) due to cognitive differences	P4: “Writing verbatim scripts can actually ease part of the tension... Even if I’m nervous again, at least I have something to read out”; P2: “If you hear me repeating a word all the time during the seven-minute debate, it’s probably because that’s the only word I know”; P1: “If I don’t know the word, I’ll change another way to express it, just say documentation”
<i>View Cooperation Conflict Events</i>	<i>Preemption or</i>	The affective response is instant and dynamic, switching rapidly with the partner’s behavior (nervousness→excitement, large emotional fluctuation→relief), and the partner’s strategic support is the key to emotional shift	P2: “I was a little nervous after my view was preempted... My partner said why don’t we amplify the brand... I said okay, then I’ll write this part”; P1: “When the initial discussion with my partner was not in-depth, my mood fluctuated a lot, and then it became a little more relaxed through adjustment”
<i>Supportive Social Interaction Events</i>		The affective gain is sublimated from individual self-efficacy to collective sense of belonging and collaborative creativity, builds a psychological safety environment through division	P4: “It felt like the two of us unconsciously output a lot of things in that state... I felt like my brain was working”; P3: “The big BP family is really warm... This kind of power really has an inspiring

of labor, complementation and effect”
 unconditional encouragement,
 and promotes the affective
 progression of “peace of
 mind→self-confidence”

As can be seen from the classification results in Table 2, the affective triggering of dramatic events presents significant bidirectional and dynamic characteristics. In terms of affective valence, the events include those that tend to trigger negative affect, such as unmet expectations or failure, viewpoint refutation, and language expression dilemmas, as well as types that bring positive affective gains such as supportive social interaction events, which confirms the core feature of the coexistence of positive and negative affect in second language learning. In terms of the law of affective development, the affective trend triggered by all events is not fixed, but highly dependent on the regulatory role of social interactions such as peer collaboration and mentor guidance, which directly echoes the core attribute of the social construction of affect in Sociocultural Theory. In addition, there are obvious divergences in the impact paths of different event types on learners’ subsequent cognition and behavior: the cognitive transformation of failure events with unmet expectations relies more on the affective repair of the external social support network, while the cognitive processing of viewpoint challenge events is more completed through learners’ self-review and reflection as well as peer collaboration.

4.2 Bidirectional Construction Paths Between Affective Experience and Social Interaction

The affective experiences triggered by the six types of dramatic events mentioned above rely on specific social interaction relationships in the context of BP English Debate for their construction, regulation, and transformation. Based on learners’ narrative content, this study further extracts three core bidirectional construction paths between affective experience and social interaction, and clarifies the differentiated mediating functions of different social interaction subjects in affective construction. The specific definitions and learners’ original narrative interpretations are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Bidirectional Construction Paths Between Affective Experience and Social Interaction

Type	Definition	Interpretation (Respondents’ Original Words)
<i>Partner Collaboration Interaction</i>	As an affective buffer and cognitive resonance box, it transforms individual emotional pressure into team motivation through goal sharing, division of labor and collaboration, and crisis sharing, laying an affective foundation for cognitive collaboration	P3: “We encouraged each other, and we also set a common goal”; P1: “I will try my best

		to talk to my partner about things I can't think of... We will have more in-depth communication backstage";
		P2: "My partner told me... why don't we amplify the brand... I said okay, then I'll write this part"
<i>Senior/Mentor Guidance Interaction</i>	Provides an interpretation framework for negative affect through affective acceptance, precise feedback and experience sharing, helps reconstruct "feeling bad" into specific improvement tasks, and realizes the "normalization→problemization→pathization" of affect	<p>P3: "My mentor was very gentle... and told me some specific methods in great detail";</p> <p>P1: "My mentor pointed out that my arguments were too jumpy, which I had been particularly worried about regarding my argumentation";</p> <p>P4: "I will focus on listening to the debate modes of senior students... and think if I speak like this when I make a speech, will it make others understand more clearly"</p>
<i>Judge/Opponent Interaction</i>	As an external benchmark, its feedback triggers an "evaluation-response" cycle, affect is adjusted in the tension between recognition (self-confidence) and	P2: "The judge gave us the first place, and also told us that we

challenge (oppression), driving learners to optimize strategies beyond their self-perspective performed extremely well”;

P3: “If he interrupts me at this time, it actually provides me with some ideas”; P1: “The opponent’s view is very extreme, which can highlight our advantages at this time”;

P4: “If the opponent’s refutation is correct, I will be like wow... If the opponent does not refute well but forces a question, I can fight back calmly”

The analysis results in Table 3 reveal the dual core functions of social interaction in second language affective construction: on the one hand, social interaction is the core trigger of affective experience, and the interactive behaviors of peers, mentors, judges, and opponents directly trigger learners’ affective fluctuations, constituting a core component of dramatic events; on the other hand, social interaction is also the core mediating tool for affective regulation and transformation, and the three differentiated interaction paths provide a targeted support system for the positive development of affect. Among them, peer collaboration interaction forms the core foundation of affective buffering, which resolves individual emotional pressure through goal sharing, division of labor and collaboration, and risk sharing, and realizes the transformation of individual emotion into team motivation; senior/mentor guidance interaction provides a professional framework support for the cognitive transformation of negative affect, and realizes the transformation of affective experience from subjective negative feelings to operable improvement paths through affective acceptance and precise feedback; judge and opponent interaction provides an external evaluation benchmark for learners, and drives learners to break through their self-perspective and optimize debate strategies in the tension between self-efficacy brought by recognition and oppression brought by challenges. The three paths are intertwined and synergistic, jointly forming a complete interaction system for the social construction of affect in the context of BP English Debate.

4.3 Dynamic Interaction Process of Cognition-Affect-Behavior

Dramatic events trigger not a linear change in a single dimension, but a dynamic development process in which cognition, affect and behavior are intertwined, mutually causal and cyclically promoted. Data analysis reveals the differentiated interaction paths presented by the four learners after experiencing typical dramatic events.

4.3.1 Path of Learner P3: Cognitive Reconstruction from “Result Comparison” to “Meaning Growth” in Supportive Interaction

After being triggered by dramatic events, the interactive development of cognition, affect, and behavior of Learner P3 presents a complete closed loop of “social support intervention - affective transformation - cognitive reconstruction - behavioral transfer”. The specific development path and the core functional logic of each link are shown in Figure 1.

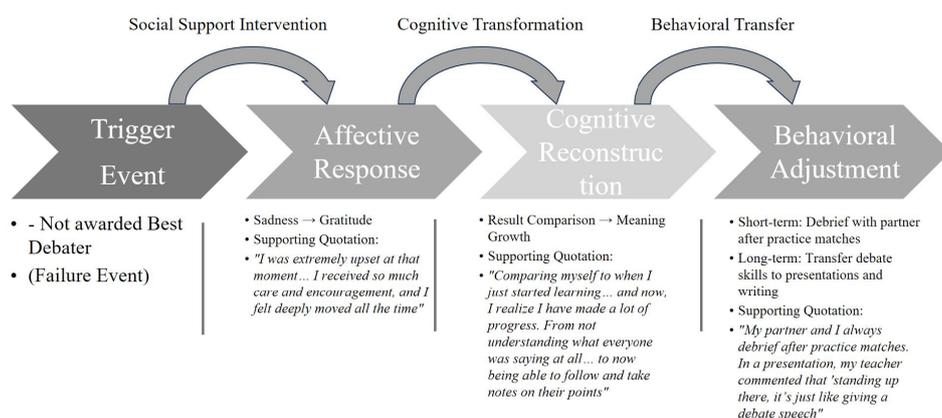


Figure 1. Path of Learner P3: “Result Comparison → Meaning Growth”

The core trigger event of P3 was failing to obtain the expected “Best Debater” award, and the initial affect was “extreme sadness”, which originated from the gap between self-expectation and external evaluation. The care and encouragement from team members and mentors constituted key social support, which gradually transformed her affect into “gratitude” and formed an affective buffer. On this basis, P3 realized cognitive reconstruction, shifting from “result-oriented comparison with others” to “growth-oriented focus on self-process”, reflecting that “I couldn’t understand everyone’s speeches at the beginning of the semester, but now I can understand and record the key points, with obvious progress”, and at the same time formed a sense of belonging to the “BP family”. At the behavioral level, she shifted from chasing external awards to focusing on “reviewing with her partner after training”, and transferred the expression skills in debate to classroom presentations, which received positive evaluation from teachers.

4.3.2 Path of Learner P4: Cognitive Expansion from “Local Content” to “Global Model” Through Observation and Imitation

The interactive development of cognition, affect, and behavior of Learner P4 presents the core feature

of “affective deepening driving the improvement of cognitive levels, and cognitive expansion guiding deliberate behavioral practice”. The development logic of each stage and the progressive relationship of cognitive levels are shown in Figure 2.

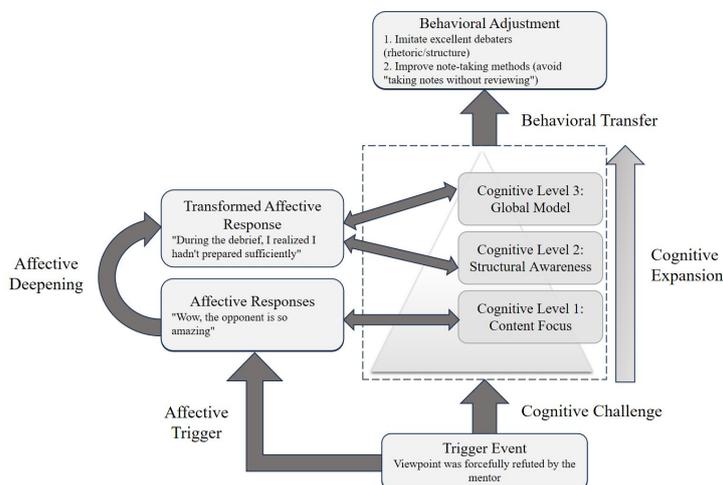


Figure 2. Path of Learner P4: “Local Content → Global Model”

The trigger event of P4 was that her argument was strongly refuted by her mentor in the debate, and the initial affect was admiration of “Wow, the opponent is so amazing”, with a psychological distance. During the post-match review, the targeted guidance from the mentor transformed the affect into internal attribution reflection of “I was not well prepared enough”, realizing affective deepening. At the cognitive level, her focus expanded from “the outcome of the debate content” to “the global elements of the debate”, and she began to pay attention to the discourse mode, strategy selection and team cooperation of excellent debaters, forming a systematic learning perspective. Behaviorally, she systematically imitated the expression structure of excellent debaters, improved her note-taking method to avoid inefficient repetition, reflecting deliberate practice driven by cognition.

4.3.3 Path of Learner P1: Metacognitive Awakening from “Quantity Accumulation” to “Quality Reflection” After Encountering Bottlenecks

Triggered by consecutive setback events, the interactive development of cognition, affect, and behavior of Learner P1 presents a development trajectory of “cumulative frustration triggering metacognitive awakening, and cognitive reconstruction promoting the formation of a closed loop of strategy iteration”. The core mechanism and the progressive relationship of each link are shown in Figure 3.

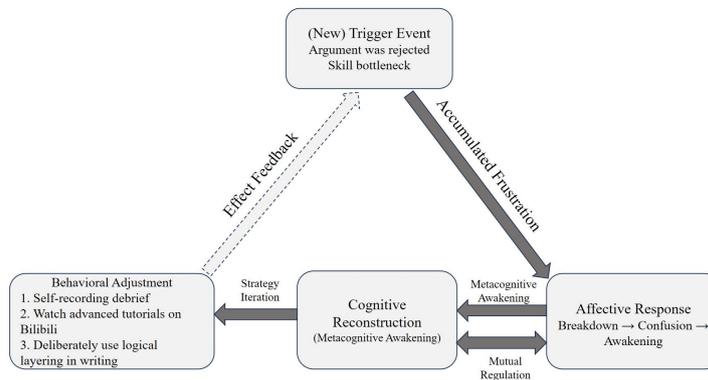


Figure 3. Path of Learner P1: “Quantity Accumulation → Quality Reflection”

P1 faced a composite trigger event of “argument being rejected” and “skill bottleneck”, and her affect went through a progressive process of “breakdown→confusion→awakening”. The continuous sense of frustration broke her blind confidence in the mode of “learning through competition” and “template application”, and promoted metacognitive awakening, making it clear that “simply increasing the number of competitions cannot achieve progress, and in-depth reflection on refutation strategies is needed”. After cognitive reconstruction, she established the strategic cognition of “in-depth reflection” and “qualitative breakthrough”, and behaviorally adopted targeted measures such as self-recording review, watching advanced tutorials, and using logical layering in writing, forming a “reflection-optimization” closed loop.

4.3.4 Path of Learner P2: Pragmatic Strategy of “Structural Innovation” Developed in Conservative Tendency Triggered by the event of her core argument being preempted, the interactive development of cognition, affect, and behavior of Learner P2 presents the core feature of “affective tension balance driving cognitive compromise, and cognitive balance guiding the strategy construction integrating conservatism and innovation”. The dynamic adaptation relationship between her affect, cognition, and behavior is shown in Figure 4.

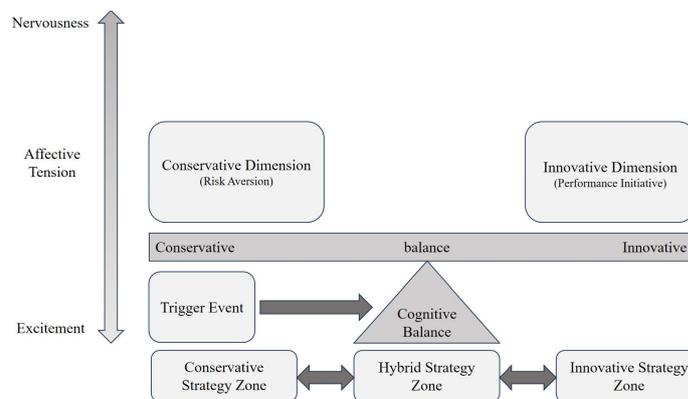


Figure 4. Path of Learner P2: “Conservative Tendency → Structural Innovation”

The path of learner P2 takes “the core argument being preempted by other debaters” as the trigger event. The initial affect was “a little nervous”, and then transformed into “excitement” with the strategic support of her partner. Her affective experience always maintained a dynamic tension between the risk anxiety of “worrying about the lack of novelty of the argument” and the performance desire of “eager to be recognized by the judges”. This affective tension did not lead to behavioral imbalance, but instead promoted her to form a cognitive balance of “conservative innovation” — clarifying that “the judge’s recognition depends more on the logical coherence and engagement (relevance to the on-site arguments) than the absolute novelty of the argument”, and found a fit point between risk aversion and performance initiative. The balance at the cognitive level was further transformed into a pragmatic behavioral strategy system: the conservative dimension is reflected in attaching importance to logical coherence, choosing “sorry later” for sharp POIs that may disrupt the rhythm, and avoiding high-risk arguments of “complete novelty”; the innovation dimension is reflected in flexibly adjusting the argumentation structure, “focusing on the common points of the on-site arguments, and pointing out the strong correlations that everyone has not noticed”, realizing the balance between risk and innovation.

5. Discussion

Based on the framework of Sociocultural Theory, this study takes “dramatic events” in BP English Debate as the core unit of analysis, and explores the construction logic of non-native English speakers’ affective experience and its guiding role in the interactive development of cognition-affect-behavior. The study finds that affect is not an isolated psychological response, but a core mediator that is stimulated and regulated in three types of social interaction: partner collaboration, senior guidance, and judge/opponent interaction, and promotes cognitive and behavioral development. This conclusion confirms the core hypothesis of Sociocultural Theory that “development originates from the internalization of social interaction”, and is consistent with the view of Qin et al. that “affect is socially constructed under the sociocultural framework”.

As the “trigger node” of affect construction, the value of dramatic events lies not in the emotional fluctuation itself, but in transforming affect into the driving force of cognitive reconstruction and behavioral adjustment through the mediating regulation of social interaction. The differentiated development paths presented by the four learners — P3’s cognitive reconstruction of “result comparison→meaning growth” under social support, P4’s cognitive expansion of “local content→global model” through observation and imitation, P1’s metacognitive awakening of “quantity accumulation→quality reflection” caused by accumulated frustration, and P2’s pragmatic strategy of “conservative tendency→structural innovation” formed in affective tension — all indicate that the social support in the learner’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) directly affects the effect of affective transformation, and different types of social interaction and individual subjective interpretation jointly shape the interaction mode of cognition-affect-behavior.

This study finds that debate experience is transferred to English argumentative writing and classroom

speaking through four dimensions: theme position, structural framework, audience awareness, and strategy invocation, and affective experience plays a key mediating and screening role in the transfer process. This finding deepens the research conclusion of Liu and Jin on “debate improving writing performance” (Liu & Jin, 2025). Affective experience affects the choice of theme and position through the “affective safety boundary”, internalizes the structured expression requirements strengthened in the debate into the logical framework of writing and classroom expression, transforms the strategy of “striving for judge recognition” into “reader consideration” in writing, and screens the successful strategies to be called preferentially with “affective markers”. This transfer is essentially the embodiment of the internalization of social interaction requirements through affective mediation (Qin, & Dai, 2013).

This study forms an organic connection with existing research: consistent with the view of Qin et al. (2025) it clarifies that the specific carrier of affect construction in the debate context is dramatic events; it supplements the research of Dewaele & MacIntyre on “the coexistence of positive and negative second language affect” (Scovel, 1978), and reveals the path of negative affect transforming into development momentum through social interaction; it deepens the contextualized interpretation of “mediation tools” and “ZPD” by Lantolf & Thorne, and confirms that affect is a key transformation mediator between social interaction and individual development; it echoes the view of Swain et al. that “perezhivanie connects the individual and the environment”, and enriches the empirical connotation of this concept in the second language interaction context.

At the theoretical level, this study incorporates affect into the “social interaction-mediation-internalization” framework of Sociocultural Theory, makes up for the limitation of the theory that emphasizes cognition and neglects affect, constructs an affect research analysis paradigm of “event trigger-interaction regulation-affective transformation-development realization”, and expands the affective perspective of second language transfer research. At the practical level, debate teaching can focus on dramatic events with high development potential and build a supportive social interaction network; second language writing teaching can design “debate-writing” linked tasks to strengthen the affect-strategy connection, and at the same time pay attention to individual differences of learners to provide differentiated support.

6. Conclusion

Framed by Sociocultural Theory, taking “dramatic events” as the core unit of analysis, adopting a narrative-oriented interpretative case study paradigm, and through video recording and semi-structured interview data, this study focuses on the construction of affective experience of non-native English speakers in BP English Debate and its guiding role in the interactive development of cognition-affect-behavior, and responds to the core research question.

The core findings of the study are as follows: First, six core types of dramatic events are identified, including unmet expectation or failure, view refutation, etc., which realize affective regulation through

three types of social interaction: partner collaboration, senior guidance, and judge/opponent interaction. Second, the four learners present differentiated development paths. Third, debate experience is transferred to English argumentative writing and classroom speaking through four dimensions: theme position, structural framework, audience awareness, and strategy invocation, and affective experience plays a key screening and driving role.

This study has certain limitations: the sample size is small and focuses on a single debate, so the generalizability of the conclusion needs to be verified; the data focuses on immediate affective changes and lacks long-term tracking; the evaluation of writing transfer is mainly based on subjective statements, and the dimensions are not comprehensive enough. Future research can expand the sample size, adopt mixed research methods to extend the tracking cycle, deepen multi-dimensional transfer evaluation, and verify the effectiveness of strategies through teaching intervention experiments.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the social construction logic of non-native English speakers' affective experience in English debate, confirms the key role of affect as a core mediator, provides contextualized empirical support for SCT, and offers operable paths for the optimization of debate and writing teaching. In the future, it is necessary to further deepen the research on the mechanism of affect driving second language development, to provide more comprehensive theoretical and practical support for non-native speakers' language learning.

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