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EDITED BY

Doris Sommer,
Harvard University, United States

REVIEWED BY

José Luis Ortega-Martín,
University of Granada, Spain

*CORRESPONDENCE

Kexin Xu
✉ 107242021200658@stu.xisu.edu.cn

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Book review: Boredom in the foreign language classroom: A micro-perspective

Kexin Xu*

School of English Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China

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As the most common academic emotion, boredom permeates many learning settings. It refers to a silent, impalpable, distressing, and pernicious emotional state that has motivated large numbers of studies in philosophy, literature, and educational psychology. However, research on boredom in L2 learning and teaching is still slightly deficient, and most is quantitative research representing a macro-perspective. That is part of why this monograph “*Boredom in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Micro-Perspective*” is dedicated to Miroslaw Pawlak, Joanna Zawodniak, and Mariusz Kruk. The main purpose of this monograph is to approach the occurrence and dynamic characteristics of boredom from interrelated theoretical and empirical angles and uncover the causes leading up to the variations of L2 learners experiencing boredom in the Polish learning context.

The monograph consists of five chapters, which are thematically interconnected. Chapter 1 explores boredom from a theoretical angle and presents an overview of boredom by elaborating on its definitions, sub-types, and antecedents, together with a sketch of its crucial components, such as disengagement. It then suggests some ways of coping with this negative emotion. Chapter 2 provides a panoramic review of empirical research on boredom. First, a description of studies in educational psychology is offered, most of which are quantitative and thus provide inadequate insights into this complex emotion. This is followed by a close examination of the handful of empirical studies on boredom as an indirect or direct object in L2 learning and teaching. The former is referred to as “a by-product of examining other aspects of L2 instruction (e.g., authentic materials, grammar teaching, and demotivation)” (p. 20), while the latter directly addresses boredom with respect to its types, causes, consequences, fluctuations, coping strategies, and intricate relationships with other individual factors. Results of the panoramic review of prior empirical studies on L2 teaching and learning pinpoint a need to tap into this complex and multifaceted construct from an “insider” view. In light of this necessity, [Pawlak et al. \(2020\)](#) adopt a mixed-methods approach to provide some quantitative and qualitative evidence for boredom. The ensuing three chapters report on the mixed-methods project on foreign language classroom boredom. Chapter 3 summarizes the methodological foundations of the project performed by the authors in the Polish educational setting and gives a very in-depth introduction to the aims of the research project, its research design, data collection, analysis, and different instruments applied to examine the dynamic characteristics of boredom and factors contributing to two groups of Polish English majors’ experience of this unpleasant emotion. Chapter 4 outlines a detailed presentation and discussion of the findings of the research project intended to explore the ups and downs as well as impact factors of boredom in two regularly scheduled integrated skills English classes taught to two groups of final-year undergraduates majoring in English in a Polish university. The quantitative data are based on questionnaires regarding general information about the subjects and their self-ratings on the boredom grid of 5-min intervals. Qualitative data are gleaned from the students’ short narratives about their experienced boredom during each class and an interview about their thoughts on the two classes taught. Statistical analysis revealed that not only did the boredom levels vary significantly in the two classes but they also tended to fluctuate within the tasks and activities a single class included or within individual students. In addition, there was a mismatch of the fluctuations in boredom

levels between individual students and the average group data. The authors argued for this phenomenon that self-reported individual boredom variations may sometimes deviate from general patterns due to the combined action of innumerable internal and external factors. Moreover, the results also showed individual and contextual factors conspiring to the variations in boredom levels including classes and language activities, non-language-related issues, and other courses. The results of the project are in line with the conceptual assumptions of the proposed models in Chapter 1 (p. 8). As proposed in the monograph, boredom is a dynamic system in time and space that is subject to the modes of class organization, the complexity of language tasks, and class components. For instance, the observed variation in boredom levels implies that students are typically more bored in repetitive, monotonous grammar classes than in speaking classes with manifold topics and tasks. Finally, several limitations, conclusions, and pedagogical implications are offered (Chapter 5).

The monograph has manifold merits. First, it offers a systematic and detailed overview of boredom from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, which has revealed the complexities and multidimensionality of boredom. For instance, the authors introduce a variety of definitions, sub-types, and antecedents of boredom in Chapter 1 and then present the practice of applying the theoretical framework of boredom in educational psychology, L2 learning, and teaching. It could be favorable for readers to have more in-depth insights into the conceptualization and characteristics of boredom. Second, the research project in this monograph approaches boredom in the spirit of the micro-perspective that puts a considerable emphasis on multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., a background questionnaire, self-ratings on the boredom grid of 5-min intervals, a semantic differential scale, a semi-structured interview, students' narratives, and lessons plans with annotations), and thus uncovers both individual trajectories and general patterns. Due to most existing studies being mainly based on quantitative designs involving large samples of participants in L2 learning and teaching, such an innovative micro-perspective could be more reliable than using only a quantitative or qualitative method and may offer the opportunity for readers to gain a profound insight into the fluctuations, causes, and complex interplay with other variables of this pervasive and distressing emotion in specific points in time. The results obtained from this nuanced and comprehensive perspective could be conducive to teachers' after-class reflection.

Unfortunately, this monograph is not without limitations. First, the link between the theoretical underpinnings and the research project could be strengthened. For instance, although the previous

two chapters offer a comprehensive review of typology and models intended to clarify the nature of boredom, the findings of identified types and causes of boredom in the project fail to pay much attention to relating those to the models highlighted earlier. Second, it would be good to extend the time span. The project investigated the dynamic characteristics of boredom by drawing on data from two 90-min lessons presenting a snapshot of L2 teaching. Studies spanning a whole semester might be undertaken to delve deeper into the thorough description and dynamic development of boredom. Third, participants had to respond to the regular beeps in a single class, which may change the ways the related activities proceed as planned. The collected self-ratings data on the boredom grid of 5-min intervals might be affected.

All in all, this monograph, through an extensive review of the theoretical framework and empirical research on the much-overlooked subject of boredom in a logical manner, as well as the valuable findings of a research project implemented in a specific context, offers a timely addition to the emerging field of boredom in L2 learning and teaching, provides more food for thought and will be an essential resource and a very thought-provoking reference for both L2 teachers and researchers who are dedicated to tapping into the dynamic experience and prevention of boredom.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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