An Empirical Study on Causal Attribution Regarding Listening Achievement of Chinese English Majors

Xiaohui Lian*

∗: Xiaohui Lian: *Department of Foreign Language and Literature Studies, Henan University of Finance and Economics, Zhengzhou, China, thisislian@126.com*

Abstract：Attribution theory plays an important role in the study of self-perception of one's academic achievement. Through questionnaire-survey and factor analysis, this study explores the attributional factors both of successful and unsuccessful self-attributions for listening achievements, as well as examines the taxonomy and tendency of these factors' attributional dimensions. Results show that social and self-comparison, rather than the test scores, are the key criteria in self-perception of listening achievements. Student's effort and teacher's aid are critical in self-attributions both for successful and unsuccessful learners. Successful learners' attributions are generally positive while unsuccessful learners' attributions are adaptive. Gender and grade differences in self-attributions both for successful learners and unsuccessful learners have also been examined and analyzed in this study.

Key Words：Attribution Theory; English Listening；Self-Attribution

Aural aspects, or listening abilities, undoubtedly play an important role in the process of which could viably be called oral-aural communication, as Brownell (2002) notes that effective communication starts with effective listening. However, listening, as one of the basic language skills, is the worst developed ability for most of the L2 learners. In China, even more emphasis has been put on listening comprehension, which can be seen from the proportion in CET band-4 and band-6 and TEM band-4 and band-8, the incompetence of listening comprehension is still an obstacle for L2 learners (Gu,2007).

As for most Chinese L2 learners, especially Chinese English Majors (EMs), failure or frustration seems to be an inevitable experience. How they attribute their failures will affect

their attitude towards future studies and hence the outcomes of their listening tasks. Meanwhile, L2 teachers also need to understand how their students attribute the academic performances so that they can help students become more effective listeners.

This study aims to explore how EMs perceive their listening outcomes, and to what factors they attribute their perceived successes and failures, as well as to find if any significant difference between different genders and grades exits.

Attribution and Attribution Theory

Attribution is a concept in social psychology referring to how individuals observe, perceive and explain causes of events, other's behavior, or their own behavior. Attribution theory (or a group of theories), is concerned with articulating people's attribution processes and shapes their future behavior accordingly. It describes how individuals develop causal explanations for behaviors and outcomes, and how their causal explanations influence subsequent reactions (Martinko, 1995).

Attribution theories are something like metatheories as they are not concerned with the actual causes of behavior but they focus on the perceived causes of behavior (Friedrich Försterling, 2001). They explore how individuals "attribute" causes to events and how this cognitive perception affects their behavior.

There are many variations of attribution theory, such as：the "naïve psychologist" and locus of attribution theory of Heider, correspondent inference model of Jones and Davis, Kelly's covariation model and Weiner's attribution theory. In this way, the attribution theory is also called "a group of attribution theories". Although there are different types of Attribution Theory, they all are concerned with the "how" and the "what" by which people process information in attempting to understand events, judge those events, and act on those events. Although there are important cultural and personal differences in attribution making (see, for example, Lawrence, Murray, Banerjee, Turner, Sangha, Byng, et al., 2006; Maddux & Yuki, 2006), attribution researchers believe that the underlying process of attempting to understand the world around us is universal, pervasive, and predictable. All these theories

support the perspective of attributing behavior from the outcomes of behavior, and hold that the observed attributions will affect the future actions and choices.

Weiner's Attribution Theory

Based on Heider's work, Bernard Weiner (1971, 1972, 1974, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1992) and his colleagues (Weiner & Kukla, 1970; Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1979) originated and later elaborated the model of attribution theory. Weiner centers his study on the reasons to which people attribute their successes and failures. In Williams' words, "Weiner has been particularly concerned with the reasons that people attribute to their perceived successes and failures in academic and other achievement situations" (Williams and Burden, 2000, p.104).

Originally, Weiner (1971) suggested that people，in general，use four kinds of attributions for explaining why success and failures occur in life：task difficulty, luck, effort and ability. And based upon Heider's internal and external locus of attribution, Weiner (1971) added an additional dimension to causal interpretation when he proposed that the stability of the cause is also included in individual's explanations of outcomes. Later，Weiner (1979) put controllability into the taxonomy of attribution theory. He then (1979, 1983, 1986, 1994) categorized attributional factors into three dimensions: locus of causality (internal vs. external), stability (stable vs. unstable) and controllability (controllable vs. uncontrollable).

Table 1 shows all the main components of Weiner's idea.

Table 1.Weiner's Attribution Factors and Dimensions

Attribution Factors	Dimensions					
	Locus of causality		Stability		Controllability	
	Internal	External	Stable	Unstable	Controllable	Uncontrollable
Ability	√		√			√
Effort	√			√	√	
Task difficulty		√	√			√
Chance / Luck		√		√		√

Weiner's model of attribution theory was the most prominent and active topic within socio-psychological field in 1980s (Pepitone, 1981), and its influence continued unabated that "no other motivational conception has achieved this degree of visibility" (Graham, 1991，cited in Georgiou 1999). It has been used in a variety of disciplines because it "focuses upon the universal concern with explanation ---- why a particular event, or state, or outcome has come about and the consequences of phenomenal causality" (Weiner, 2000).

Attribution Theory in explanation of Academic Achievements and L2 Achievements

Attribution has been studied mostly in the sphere of psychology and educational psychology. From the very beginning of the attribution theory, Heider (1958) hypothesized that since learners were "naïve psychologists", they would constantly analyze reasons for the success and failure of the tasks related to their academic achievement. These achievement attributions would affect learner's affect responses, expectancy to future success and subsequent behaviors, and accordingly, learner's academic achievement. E.g., attributions to internal factors for success may increase self-worth, or vise versa. This is just as Lefcourt (1983) argued that students who believe they can influence the outcome of their work are more likely to be motivated in academic studies.

With his more specific model, Weiner (1979, 1985) hypothesized that attribution or perceived causes of academic outcomes may influence achievement behaviors, expectancies and affects. He argues that students often attribute successes and failures to such factors as ability, effort, task difficulty and luck, which will strongly influence their attitude toward their role in language learning. He further suggested that factors within locus of causality and controllability dimensions mainly affect responses, those within stability and controllability dimensions mainly affect expectancy, and those within stability and locus of causality dimensions mainly affect subsequent behaviors. As for locus of causality, if learners attribute success to internal factors such as ability, it will generate positive academic motivation and behaviors. On the other hand, if learners attribute success to external factors such as ease of the task, or attribute failure to internal factors such as inability, it will bring about negative effects to learners (Weiner, 1979).

Weiner's ideas were supported widely. Platt (1988) figured out that factors within the three dimensions would intervene and affect learners' academic achievement directly or indirectly via expectancy, affect responses and subsequent behaviors. Struthers et al (1996) suggested that attribution theory verifies important cognitive, affective, behavioral variables and their relations, and is particularly suited to study learners' motivation and academic achievement.

Numerous studies have since then been conducted on the role of attribution in academic achievement. However, it was not until 1990s that Weiner's model of attribution theory has been widely applied in the study of L2 acquisition situations (Skehan 1991; Oxford & Shearin 1994). Unfortunately, the investigations in this field are relatively rare. Williams and Burden (1999) suggested that "…it seems that attribution theory is an extremely promising area for research into language learning." People found that Learner's success and failure attributions are very important for L2 learning and teaching (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

From the above discussion, the major difference of attributions of L2 from those of other academic achievements lies in that L2 learners focus more on external factors such as teachers, family, classroom environment, etc. It may be resulted from the case that, in comparison with other academic tasks such as mathematics and reading, L2 is more practice-oriented and more communication-oriented with teachers and peer learners.

Researchers also noticed that different cultural background will bring L2 learners different attribution tendencies (Gray, 2005). In a Western context, an internal orientation, e.g. ability, is related to academic success. Persons with an internal locus of control seem to show more overt striving for achievement than persons with an external locus of control (Rotter, 1971). Furthermore, persons with an internal orientation seem to be more cognitively active (Erlund, 1984).

In china, attribution theory has been introduced in the field of L2 not long ago but Chinese researchers (i.e., Wang 1991; Qin, 1998, 2002; Qin & Wen 2002, Li, 2004, Chen, 2008., etc.) have conducted several studies on Chinese learners' success and failure attributions in English learning. They found that attribution theory is useful both for L2

teachers and learners once the theory is applied in the analysis of learners' attribution tendency as well as in the training of learners' self-attribution.

One of the researchers' efforts were put on the theoretical relationship between motivation and causal attribution in L2 learning (Wang, 1991; Qin, 1998, 2002; Qin & Wen, 2002). Their findings revealed that attribution held direct impact on motivation in L2 learning via such factors as self-confidence, learning purpose, goal setting, etc. In another study, Jiang (2003) used the modified version of Multidimensional- Multiattributional Causality Scales (MMCS) (Lefcourt, 1981) to work on the impact of success and failure attributions in L2 learners' strategies used. She concluded that the success and failure attributions of L2 learners were significantly correlated with the use of different learning strategies. To be more specific, success attributions to capability, efforts, luck may predict different learning strategies from failure attribution to luck.

In general, they all found that L2 learners in China often attributed to such variables as efforts, learning strategies, learning environment, classroom teaching, past learning experiences, language competence, etc. They also categorized the learner's causal attributions in the following four aspects: attribution to environment, attribution to classroom teaching, attribution to language aptitude and attribution to efforts.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to find attributional studies on the specific L2 learning tasks, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. As listening play important role in L2 study, it is therefore advantageous to possess effective listening attributions both for EMs and their teachers.

The present study is designed to understand how EMs attribute their failures and successes in completing their L2 listening tasks; what reasons they give for their attributions; and whether they feel they are in control of their listening learning experiences，so as to give advices on successfully managing their listening outcomes．

To be more specific, the present study is in effort to answer the following questions:

(1) How do EMs perceive their listening performance? And what are the criteria of their perceptions?

(2) To what factors do EMs attribute their success or failure in L2 listening? Is there any significant difference between success attributions and failure attributions?

(3) What are the demographic differences between EMs' success and failure attributions?

Data Collection

The subjects of this research are 471 undergraduates from 4 grades of Business English Department of Henan University of Finance and Economics (HUFE). They were all English majors. Among them, 20 did not respond or not appropriately respond to the survey. So, there are 451 qualified participants finally. Their ages range from 19 to 25. Table 2 shows the details.

Table 2.Descriptive statistics of the Subjects (Grade, Gender & Missing)

Grade	Gender		Sum	Missing	Total
	Male	Female			
2008	12	88	100	3	103
2007	18	105	123	6	129
2006	10	82	92	7	99
2005	22	114	136	4	140
Total	62	389	451	20	471

A questionnaire with 40 items has been developed and applied as instrument in this study to measure the causal attributions of listening achievement for Chinese English majors. As there was no existing scale in measuring the causal attributions of listening achievements of EMs, the questionnaire has been developed on the basis of Russell's (1982) Causal Dimension Scale (CDS) and Lefcourt's (1979, 1981) Multidimensional -Multiattributional Causality Scale (MMCS). These two scales have been later merged into a new scale in this study: the Causal Attribution Scale for Listening Achievements (CASLA).

Another instrument used in this study is the learner's performance on term listening exams (TLE) (of freshmen and sophomores) and on TEM4 (of juniors). Upon the survey,

seniors did not have any listening-oriented tests. So, no performance has been coded into calculations concerning with seniors.

The questionnaire-survey was conducted with the subjects of the research. The subjects are more representative of the population of the Chinese English majors as a whole and hence a higher validity of the study has been achieved. In order to ensure the reliability of the study, the questionnaire-survey was administered in regular English class hours in March, 2009.

The Self-Perceptions of Listening achievements

In order to explore the relationship between the perceived achievement and the listening test performance, a descriptive analysis of the subjects' self-perception on their listening achievement and the actual performance of the term listening exams (TLE) and TEM4 was conducted. Results shows that the scores of self-perceived successful subjects are higher than those of self-perceived unsuccessful subjects, The standard deviations of TLE scores of self-perceived successful subjects are lower than those of the self-perceived unsuccessful subjects, which indicated that the unsuccessful subjects differed more in their TLE performance than the successful subjects. At the same time, the standard deviations of TEM4 scores of self-perceived successful subjects are higher than those of the self-perceived unsuccessful subjects, which indicated that the successful subjects differed more in their TEM4 performance than the unsuccessful subjects. Table 3 shows the details of the report.

Table 3.Descriptive Statistics of TLT, TEM Scores and Self-perception

Self-perception	Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Successful	TLE	68	57	97	80.82	7.784
	TEM4	56	50	80	66.67	7.011
Unsuccessful	TLE	155	45	94	76.60	10.485
	TEM4	36	52	75	66.39	5.188

A noteworthy point here is that the validity and reliability of TLE have not been tested, while those of TEM4 have been widely proved statically satisfactory by numerous studies. So the results of TEM4 is much reliable than those of TLE in this study.

Another interesting finding here is that some subjects who scored not highly in the tests self-reported themselves as successful listeners, while some subjects who scored very highly self-reported themselves as unsuccessful listeners. This implied that the subjects did not take scores they got in the test as the only standard to judge whether they were successful in ELL or not.

Then, in order to explore how subjects perceived their success or failure in their L2 listening studies, a descriptive report was conducted. The result shows that, 61.2% of the total subjects identified themselves as unsuccessful L2 listeners, while 38. 8% of the total admitted that they were satisfied with their L2 listening outcomes. This indicates the majority of the students lack confidence in their L2 listening tasks. However, most males (56.5%) believed themselves as successful listeners while only 36.2% of the females hold the same belief.

This is very interesting because females are generally believed to be more talented in language learning. One of the possible explanations of this result may lie in that the male English majors are outstanding enough to survive the National Entrance Test (NET). Most of these males are more confident than their counterparts even they are relatively rare in numbers (62 to 389) at their college studies.

On the other hand, the majority of the freshmen (79.5% for females and 75% for males) perceived themselves as unsuccessful listeners while most juniors (61% for females and 60% for males) hold the opposite belief. Two important tests, the NET and TEM (Test for English Majors) Band 4, may play critical roles in interpreting this result: for most freshmen, NET did not conclude a listening test; for most juniors, as most of them have passed TEM (which enclosed a listening comprehension test), good scores would foster more confidence than their peers in any other grade.

Analysis of the Criteria of Self-Perceptions of Listening Achievements

The analysis of the Criteria of self-perceptions of listening achievements is conducted on the third part of the questionnaire. Among all the 451 subjects, 379 subjects made their choices within the 3 given criteria: C1 ("comparison with others"), C2 ("comparisons with other courses"), and C3 ("comparisons with previous listening outcomes"), while 72 subjects reported other criteria.

The purpose of the analysis is to explore upon what criteria the subjects' self-perceptions of listening achievements are based. Results offer a clearer description of the tendencies for the subjects' choices. Both successful males and females intend to make their perceptions based on the internal consideration: C2, a latitude review of one's self; and C3, a longitude review of one's self. Nevertheless, unsuccessful females and males present a striking contrast to this finding: they are more likely to choose C1, which indicates a relative lack of confidence.

A further analysis in terms of grade, perception and criteria reinforced the above findings. For all 4 grades, self-perceived successful subjects intend to choose C2 and C3, while the self-perceived unsuccessful subjects are prone to take C1.

It is noteworthy that for self-reported successful listeners, C3 ("comparisons with previous listening outcomes") is their most frequently chosen criterion, which means successful listeners are more likely to make continuous progresses in their L2 studies.

For the subjects who took C4 (other choices), no matter successful or unsuccessful, no matter males or females, the degree of satisfaction for the expectation of listening achievements determines their self-perceived success or failure in L2 listening studies. Other mentioned rationales include learning strategies, talent, effort and frustrations, all of which can be discussed later.

Factor Analyses

In order to explore the inner structure of the subjects' attribution tendency, factor analysis on CASLA is used in this study. Factor analysis could be described as an orderly simplification (or reduction) of interrelated measures, as well as a structure detection method.

Traditionally, factor analysis has been used to explore the possible underlying structure of a set of interrelated variables without imposing any preconceived structure on the outcome. By performing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the number of constructs and the underlying factor structure are identified. On the other hand, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) allows the researcher to test the hypothesis that a relationship between the observed variables and their underlying latent construct(s) exists.

In this study, EFA has been conducted at the first stage to explore the latent factors of CASLA, followed by CFA to confirm the structure of the latent variable in CASLA.

Data of 40 items in CASLA were processed by SPSS and the corresponding value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.894. The value indicates that the CASLA is very good in reliability. It is then very confident of the reliability of CASLA. And the KMO value is 0.878, which falls into the range of being great. It is then very confident of the reliability of CASLA and the factor analysis is appropriate in this scale. (as shown in table 4)

Table 4.KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.878
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5081.231
	df	780
	Sig.	.000

Then the data has been process to extract factors for both self-perceived successful and unsuccessful listeners. Then, they're compared by their importance according to the initial Eigenvalues. Both self-perceived successful and unsuccessful subjects agree to attribute their listening outcomes to "Effort", "Teacher", "Language Settings", "Learning Strategy", "Task Difficulty" and "Ability". The difference is that, the self-perceived unsuccessful subjects put one more factor: "Other's Help", which indicates they need relatively more helps.

Meanwhile, they all attribute their listening outcomes first to "Effort", while "Teacher" and "Language Settings" also play important roles. Successful listeners tend to believe that

they are more talented in listening studies as the "Task Difficulty" is valued very low while their unsuccessful counterparts do not believe so. Unsuccessful listeners tend to think they do not lack the "Ability" in listening tasks but need to find good "Learning Strategy" while successful listeners care this factor least. Compared with their successful peers, they think they need "Other's Help". Table 5shows the details.

Table. 5 Importance Rank of Attributional Factors

Importance	Self-perceived successful subjects		Self-perceived unsuccessful subjects	
	Attributions	Initial Eigenvalue	Attributions	Initial Eigenvalue
1	*Effort*	7.521	*Effort*	5.569
2	*Teacher*	2.878	*Learning Strategy*	2.717
3	*Language Settings*	2.284	*Teacher*	2.28
4	*Ability*	1.569	*Task Difficulty*	1.78
5	*Task Difficulty*	1.440	*Language Settings*	1.44
6	*Learning Strategy*	1.371	*Other's Help*	1.29
7			*Ability*	1.22

Dimensionality of the Factors

As we have discussed, Weiner (1979) has proposed a causal taxonomy with three basic dimensions: locus, stability, and controllability. This taxonomy includes 4 most reported attributions: ability, effort, task difficulty and luck (see table 3). However, Weiner (1985) has cautioned that the dimensional placement of causes may not necessarily remain constant between people and situations.

A brief overview of classifications for achievement attributions documented in prior research has been conducted by Frank Van Overwalle (1989). Overwalle's summary includes causal locations in terms of locus, stability and controllability, resulting from prior studies. Based on his work, this paper takes that "Intelligence" can be interpreted as "Ability" as in CASLA, while "Effort" as "Effort", "Habits" as "Learning Strategy", "Help" as "Other's

Help", "Teaching" as "Teacher", "Difficulty" as "Task Difficulty". For these factors, it is easy to follow Overwalle's finding to assort the taxonomies.

Thus, "Effort" and "Learning Strategy" can be regarded as an internal, controllable and unstable factor; "Ability" can be sorted as an internal, uncontrollable and stable factor; "Teacher" can be sorted as an external, controllable and stable factor; "Task Difficulty" can be sorted as an external, uncontrollable and unstable factor; "Learning Settings" in this study is a new finding to Overwalle's work, which can be logically categorized into external, stable and uncontrollable factors.

Consequently, the dimensionality of attributions in CASLA is obtained. Table 6 shows the details.

Table 6. Success and Failure Causal Dimensions of CASLA

Subjects	Locus	Controllable		Uncontrollable	
		Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable
Self-perceived Successful	Internal		*Effort* *Learning Strategy*	*Ability*	
	External	*Teacher*		*Language Settings*	*Task Difficulty*
Self-perceived Unsuccessful	Internal		*Effort* *Learning Strategy*	*Ability*	
	External	*Teacher*	*Others' Help*	*Language Settings*	*Task Difficulty*

Causal Attribution Tendency

As we have presented, Heider (1958) hypothesized that achievement attributions would affect learners' responses and expectancy to learners' future academic behaviors and achievement. In this study, both self-perceived successful and unsuccessful subjects attribute their success or failure in L2 listening to "Effort", "Teacher's Help", "Language Settings", "Learning Strategy" "Task Difficulty", and "Ability", while "Other's Help" is particularly mentioned as a failure attribution by subjects who self-perceived as unsuccessful listeners.

Among the factors found in this study, "Effort", "Ability" and "Learning Strategy" are factors in internal locus of causality. In Weiner's theory (1979), individuals who perceive an internal locus of causality believe that they are personally responsible for their successes and failures. Moreover, Weiner put that if learners attribute academic success to internal factors such as "Ability" and "Effort", or attribute failure to internal factors such as lack of "Effort", positive academic motivation and behaviors will be generated; if learners attribute failure to internal factors such as lack of "Ability", it will generate negative effects on academic motivation and behaviors.

For successful listeners in this study, attributions to internal factors for success may increase self-worth. The result indicates that, successful listeners in this study perceived their achievement as a result of their "Effort", "Learning Strategy" and "Ability" in their listening learning jobs. This confirms those of many attribution studies in academic achievement research field (Georgiou, 1999; Park& Kim, 1998; Wagner et al., 1989) and in L2 field at home and abroad (Graham, 2004; Li, 2004; Qin, 1998, 2002; Qin & Wen, 2002). Both "Effort" and "Learning Strategy" are internal, controllable factors which can be controlled by the learner as well as an unstable factor which means can escape if one does not keep it. So, successful listeners will be highly motivated to invest more effort in their future learning tasks. This is just as Lefcourt (1981) argued that students who believe they can influence the outcome of their works are more likely to be motivated in academic studies. Meanwhile, "Ability" is an internal and stable but not controllable factor which means it will bring high confidence for successful learners since they would not worry about losing this advantage.

For unsuccessful listeners in this study, they reported that they were not diligent enough, with neither good methods nor talents in their listening tasks, as they also attribute their failure to "Effort", "Learning Strategy" and "Ability". Many researchers have found the same result that learners tend to attribute failure to lack of effort and good learning strategies (Wagner et al., 1989; Park & Kim, 1998; Georgiou, 1999; Graham, 2004; Qin, 1998, 2002; Qin & Wen, 2002; Li, 2004). As Weiner (1979) posits that, the failure attributions to the lack of effort and learning strategies are adaptive since these factors are not stable and easy to be controlled. On the contrary, listeners who attribute failure to "Ability" would be more prone

to generate negative academic motivation and behaviors since these factors are stable and not easy to be controlled.

Among the factors found in this study, "Teacher", "Other's Help", "Language Settings" and "Task Difficulty" are factors in external locus of causality. In Weiner's theory, individuals who perceive an external locus of causality may interpret their behavior as being caused by external events. Weiner (1979) holds that these external factors are adaptive in that these factors would directly or indirectly affect learners' academic motivation and effort, and accordingly determine the academic outcomes. Weiner further put that if learners attribute success or failure to external factors such as the ease of a task, it will bring about negative effects to learners; if learners attribute success or failure to external factors such as the difficulty of a task, it will bring about positive effects on academic motivation and behaviors.

For successful listeners in this study, attributions to external factors for success may generally increase one's self-worth. The results of this study indicate that, successful listeners hold positive attitude to the "Teacher", "Language Settings" and "Task Difficulty". This finding also coincides with previous studies which uncovered learners' tendency of acknowledging teacher or learning environment (O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996; Park & Kim, 1998; Williams & Burden, 1999; Qin, 1998, 2002; Tse, 2000; Qin & Wen, 2002). As "Teacher" and "Other's Help" are controllable factors, successful listeners may seek for more help from these two sources to maintain their achievements. As "Language Settings" and "Task Difficulty" are uncontrollable, these successful listeners may have benefitted a lot from these two factors and are satisfied with them.

For unsuccessful listeners in this study, attributions to external factors were set to "Teacher's Help", "Others' Help", "Language Settings" and "Task Difficulty". This indicates that they may feel their tasks are not easy and hence need more help from others, e.g. teachers, families and classmates. As "Teacher" and "Other's Help" are controllable and unstable factors, it is lucky for unsuccessful listeners in that they have chances to change the situations. Unsuccessful listeners are even more likely to hold that their "Language Settings" is not good enough. These findings imply that these external factors function negatively on listeners' academic motivation and effort, and directly or indirectly lead to listeners' academic failure, which confirms Qin's study (2002).

As "Teacher" is also a stable factor, when students find their teachers and English class interesting, they may feel more confident in their tasks and are prone to succeed in their studies. What can be implied from these findings is that teachers should guide and encourage learners to attribute failure to "Effort" and "Learning Strategy" but not to "Ability". In this way, unsuccessful listeners will be fostered to find good strategies and work more diligently in future.

Demographic Differences

The gender differences in L2 performances have attracted a considerable amount attention among educational researchers. One research area that still needs attention is gender-related differences in attribution for one's own success or failure. Although the results of studies have not been consistent, a number of researchers have found that American males tend to make more internal attributions for success and more external attributions for failure than do American females (Lochel 1983, cited in Joseph &William 1998). Gender differences have also been found in studies completed in Asian countries; for example, Misra (1986) found that within college students from India successful females tended to show greater attribution for their performance to external causes such as luck and task difficulty than successful males. These findings corroborate the earlier studies by Weiner (1986).

In order to investigate the gender difference for EMs' listening attributions, an independent-samples *t*-test has been conducted on the summated scale for both self-perceived successful and unsuccessful subjects. As the result of the test, a significant difference across gender was identified. It found that, among the self-perceived successful subjects, "Learning Strategy" has acted as a more important factor to self-perceived successful female subjects than to self-perceived successful male subjects. This may indicate that, for successful subjects, female EMs care more about the "Learning Strategy" than their counterparts. As "Learning Strategy" is an internal, controllable and unstable factor, this result indicates that successful girls are more positive at searching good learning strategies and methods at listening studies. No significant difference between failure factors such as "Efforts", "Teacher", "Language Settings", "Ability", "Other's Help", "Task Difficulty" and different genders was found. Table 7 shows the details.

Table 7. Comparison of Success and Failure Factors for Difference Gender (N = 300)

	Mean Score			
	Male	Female	t-test Value	2-tailed Sig.
Success Factors				
1. Effort	2.5021	2.6861	-1.668	.097
2. Teacher	2.5114	2.5338	-.178	.859
3. Language Settings	2.6143	2.6046	.077	.938
4. Ability	2.6000	2.5520	.352	.725
5. Task Difficulty	2.7357	2.7861	-.466	.642
6. Learning Strategy	**2.2667**	**2.5225**	**-2.256**	**.024 ∗**
Failure Factors				
1. Effort	3.2167	3.1960	.170	.865
2. Learning Strategy	2.9321	3.0598	-1.171	.243
3. Teacher	2.8704	2.7110	1.314	.190
4. Task Difficulty	3.3148	3.3397	-.219	.827
5. Language Settings	2.3333	2.2396	.754	.452
6. Other's Help	2.9753	3.1660	-1.673	.096
7. Ability	3.1574	3.1683	-.096	.923

∗ 2-Tail sig. < 0.05

Clearly, the result of study shows that there were only slight differences on gender attribution. This does not concur with research findings from Western and other Asian countries where girls significantly attributed their success more to external causes such as help from their family, ease of the examination, and the easier course than boys, and attributed their failure more to internal causes such as low intelligence and low mood. Perhaps, it was due to culture difference.

Table 8 Comparison of Success and Failure Factors for Different Grades

	Mean Score						Sig.Diff
	Grade1	Grade2	Grade3	Grade4	F ratio	F prob.	Between Groups
Success Factors							
Effort	2.9784	2.6064	2.5958	2.6136	2.569	.056	
Teacher	2.6508	2.6631	2.5851	2.2994	3.211	**.024***	Grade2 and 4
Language Settings	2.2976	2.6170	2.7321	2.5865	2.280	.081	
Ability	2.6905	2.5957	2.4792	2.5673	.501	.682	
Task Difficulty	2.9405	2.8351	2.5818	2.8654	3.470	**.017***	Grade 3 and 4
Learning Strategy	2.6032	2.4858	2.4911	2.3846	.708	.548	
Failure Factors							
Effort	3.1873	3.1026	3.1347	3.3214	1.987	.116	
Learning Strategy	3.2759	3.0259	2.9870	2.8774	8.341	**.000***	Grade 1 and 4
Teacher	2.6835	2.6612	3.0023	2.7083	3.075	**.028***	Grade 2 and 3
Task Difficulty	3.6582	3.2829	3.1458	3.1667	14.823	**.000***	Grade 1 and 2,3,4
Language Settings	1.9589	2.3257	2.5509	2.3224	10.608	**.000***	Grade 1 and 3
Other's Help	3.1551	3.1842	3.1042	3.1250	.225	.879	
Ability	3.2785	3.1414	2.8588	3.2183	5.207	**.002***	Grade 1 and 3

Note: Grade 1: Freshmen (2008); Grade 2: Sophomores (2007); Grade 3: Junior (2006); Grade 4: Senior (2005).   * F prob. at <0.05 level

In order to explore if any difference across the four grades exists, an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test was conducted in this study. In this ANOVA test, "Grade" was set as factor and "Effort", "Teacher", "Learning Settings", "Ability", "Task Difficulty", "Other's Help" and "Learning Strategy" as dependents. Homogeneity of variance was first conducted to test the qualification of the ANOVA analysis. A good result has been reached and the ANOVA test and a multiple comparisons of the success and failure factors in terms of grade differences have been conducted. The result of ANOVA analysis suggests that significant

differences were distinguished between "Teacher", "Task Difficulty" and grade differences for successful subjects. No difference of "Efforts" and "Language Settings", "Ability" and "Learning Strategy" were found across different grades. For unsuccessful subjects, "Learning Strategy", "Teacher", "Task Difficulty", "Language Settings" and "Ability" were found significant differences across grades. No difference of "Effort" and ""Other's Help" were distinguished. Table 8 shows the details.

For successful subjects, the importance of "Teacher" is decreasing when grades grow higher, and the seniors feel more "Task Difficulty" than juniors. As "Teacher" is an external, stable and controllable factor, the finding may indicate that subjects are more confident when grades (ages) grow. By examine the specific task loading of juniors and seniors of HUFE, their attribution tendency on "Task Difficulty" can be explained: most juniors has just passed TEM band 4 and so they are more confident than seniors, who were frustrated by more advanced English courses, e.g., Oral Interpretation. With the help of Means Plot, differences are shown more clearly.

For unsuccessful subjects, the importance of "Learning Strategy" and the perception of "Task Difficulty" were decreasing when grades grow higher. Juniors value both "Teacher" and "Language Settings" higher than sophomores and freshmen respectively, but value "Ability" lower than freshmen. No difference of "Efforts" and "Other's Help" were found across different grades.

As "Learning Strategy" is an internal, unstable and controllable factor while "Task Difficulty" is an external, unstable and uncontrollable factor, it is easy to conclude that unsuccessful subjects are feeling better as grades grow: they feel tasks easier and they can control something as "Learning Strategy" is not as important as ever. On the hand, both "Teacher" and "Language Settings" are external and stable factors, while "Ability" is internal, stable and uncontrollable factor, juniors may appear to be more adaptive for their failure and freshmen may seek more excuse from their talents. This may imply that teachers should pay more attention for these grades. With the help of Means Plots, differences are shown more clearly.

Conclusion

Academic attribution affects learner's affect responses, expectancy to future success and subsequent behaviors, and accordingly affects learner's academic achievement. This is also true in L2 listening activities for Chinese English Majors. English listening process is an interactive process which demands the listener's full involvement. As previous researches only employed top-down approaches in the description of commonly recognized achievement attributions of L2 learning in general, this study offers a bottom-up factor-analysis of achievement attributions in L2 listening settings for Chinese English majors .

As having presented in this study, a panorama of EM's success and failure listening attributions is presented, which provides a better theoretical understanding of L2 achievement attributions. Chinese EMs attribute either their listening success or failure to internal factors such as "Effort", "Ability", "Learning Strategy" and external factors such as "Teacher", "Language Settings", "Task Difficulty", and "Other's Help". The finding does reveal the pedagogical implications between two key players in the listening process: the language learners and their teachers. This means EMs should invest much effort in listening if they want to succeed while they should develop proper learning strategies on listening studies. Others' Helps, as found in this study, especially the indispensable helps from teachers and families are key to the success in ELL which in turn demand EMs learn to communicate with from these "external" resources in their language learning process.

What would be addressed with a special attention in this study is that a new attributional factor, namely "Language Settings" both in class and at home, is determined in this study in which we can understand the mechanism of Chinese Ems learning in a more profound way. Definitely, teachers and families should provide opportunities for Ems to practice the language they learnt as much as possible. Teachers especially should help EMs through appropriate interventions and reattribution training and guide them to stay away from the anxieties caused from listening task difficulty.

On the other hand, attributional differences of genders and grades explored in this study opens up the investigation on the relationship between the factors of success and failure listening attributions and the demographic characteristics of L2 learners both in China and

abroad. It is recommended to go further and involve more variables related to EMs' listening achievement attribution, such as the real-world achievement (rather than a self-perceived achievement), self-efficacy, self-esteem, future success expectancy, goal-setting, etc., in future works.

REFERENCES:

Brownell, J. (2002). *Listening: Attitudes, principles and skills*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon Publishers.

Chen, W. (2008) .A Survey on the Causal Attributions to English Studies of College Students.Journal of Lishui College 14(4):16-22.

Crookes, G., & Schmidt, R. (1991). Motivation: Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning*, *41*(4), 469-512.

Dornyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, *78*(3), 273-284.

Erlund, C. J. (1984). *Human Potential Seminar: Its effects upon grade point average and other selected characteristics of community / junior college students.* Unpublished Doctoral dissertation. East Texas University.

Försterling, F. (2001). *Attribution: An introduction to theories, research, and applications*. London: Psychology Press.

Georgiou, S. N. (1999). Achievement attributions of sixth grade children and their parents. *Educational Psychology*, *19*(4), 399-412.

Graham, S. J. (2004). Giving up on modern foreign languages? Students' perceptions of learning French. *Modern Language Journal*, *88*(2), 171-191.

Gray, R. (2005). Attribution theory and second language learning: Results and implications. *CELEA Journal*, *28*(5), 13-17.

Gu, Y (2007) .Analysis on Why English Listening frustrates. *Journal of Suzhou Industrial technologies*,1(1):22-25.

Heider, F. (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relation*. New York: Wiley.

Joseph M.K & T.R William.(1998) A multi-level analysis of cultural experience and gender

influences on causal attributions to perceived performance in mathematics. *British Journal of Educational psychology 68:25-37*

Lawrence, V. et al. (2006). Concepts and causation of depression: A cross-cultural study of the beliefs of older adults. *The Gerontologist*, *46*, 23–33.

Lefcourt, H. M. (1981). The construction and development of the Multidimensional-Multiattributional Causality Scales. In H. M. Lefcourt (Ed.), *Research with the Locus of Control Construct*. London: Academic Press.

Li, C. (2004). Application of attribution theory in research of English learning behaviors of non-English majors. *Foreign Language World*, *20*(6), 41-45.

Maddux, W. W., & Yuki, M. (2006). The "ripple effect": Cultural differences in perceptions of the consequences of events. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*, 669–684.

Martinko, M. J. (1995). *Attribution theory: An organizational perspective*. Delray Beach, FL: St. Lucie Press.

Misra J.G.& S.Misra,(1986). Effects of social economic background on pupils attribution.

Journal of Current Psychological Research 78:12-28

O'Sullivan, J. T., & Howe, M. L. (1996). Causal attributions and reading achievement: Individual differences in low-income families. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *21*(4), 363-387.

Overwalle, F. V. (1989). Structure of freshmen's causal attributions for exam performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *81*(3), 400-407.

Oxford, R. & Shearin, J. (1994). Language learning motivation: Expanding the theoretical framework. *Modern Language Journal*, *78*(1), 12-28.

Park, Y-S., & Kim, U. (1998). Locus of control, attributional style, and academic achievement: Comparative analysis of Korean, Korean-Chinese, and Chinese students. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *1*(2), 191-208.

Pepitone, A. (1981). Lessons from the history of social psychology. *American Psychologist*, *36*(9), 972-985.

Qin, X. (1998). An Investigation into the Internal Structure of EFL Motivation at the Tertiary Level in China. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nanjing University, Nanjing.

Qin, X. (2002). Motivational researches and foreign language learning. *Foreign Language Research,* 4, 74-80.

Qin, X. & Wen, Q. (2002) The internal structure of motivation of the students at tertial level.

Foreign Language Teaching and Research 1:54-60

Rotter, J. B. (1971). External control and internal control. *Psychology Today*, 5, 37-59.

Skehan, P. A. (1991). Individual difference in second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *13*, 275-298.

Struthers, W. C., Menec, V. H., Schonwetter, D. J., & Perry, R. P. (1996). The effects of perceived attributions, action control, and creativity on college students' motivation and performance: A field study. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *8*(2), 121-139.

Tse, L. (2000). Student perceptions of foreign language study: A qualitative analysis of foreign language autobiographies. *Modern Language Journal*, *84*(1), 69-84.

Wagner, D. A., Spratt, J.E., Gal, L, & Paris, S. G. (1989). Reading and believing: Beliefs, attributions, and reading achievement in Moroccan schoolchildren. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *81*(3), 283-293.

Wang, C. (1991). The cognitive and affective factors in language learning, 4, 23-27.

Weiner, B., & Kukla, A. (1970). An attributional analysis of achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *13*(1), 1-20.

Weiner, B., Heckhausen, H., & Cook, R. E. (1972). Causal ascriptions and achievement behavior: A conceptual analysis of effort and reanalysis of locus of control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *21*(2), 239-248.

Weiner, B. (1974). An attributional interpretation of expectancy-value theory. In B. Weiner (Ed.), *Cognitive Views of Human Motivation*. New York: Academic Press.

Weiner, B. (1979). A Theory of Motivation for Same Classroom Experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *71*, 3-25.

Weiner, B., Russell, D., & Lerman, D. (1979). The cognition-emotion process in achievement related contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*(7), 1211-1220.

Weiner, B. (Ed). (1972) *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior*. Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press.

Weiner, B. (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *71*(1), 3-25.

Weiner, B. (1983). Some methodological pitfalls in attributional research. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, (4), 530-543.

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychology Review*, *92*(40), 548-573.

Weiner, B. (1986). *An Attributional Theory of Emotion and Motivation*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Weiner, B. (1992). *Human motivation: metaphors, theories, and research*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Weiner, B. (1994). Integrating social and personal theories of achievement striving. *Review of Educational Research*, *64*(4), 557-573.

Weiner, B. (2000). Intrapersonal and interpersonal theories of motivation from an attributional perspective. *Educational Psychology Review*, *12*(1), 1-14.

Williams, M.,& Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology For Language Teachers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1999). Students' developing conceptions of themselves as language learners. *Modern Language Journal*, *83*(2), 193-201.

Jiang,X.(2003).Causal attributional Effects on the English Learning Strategies. *PLA's University of Foreign Language Studies*, 3 (2):35-40.