Motivation as a Contributing Factor in Second Language Acquisition

Jacqueline Norris-Holt
jacquijapan [at] hotmail.com
Aichi Shukutoku High School (Nagoya, Japan)

This paper explores Gardner's socio-educational model and the significance of motivation as a contributing factor in second language (L2) acquisition. Motivation is defined as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language. Motivation is divided into two basic types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is characterised by the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community. Instrumental motivation underlies the goal to gain some social or economic reward through L2 achievement, thus referring to a more functional reason for language learning. Both forms of motivation are examined in light of research which has been undertaken to establish the correlation between the form of motivation and successful second language acquisition. Motivation in the Japanese EFL context is then discussed and studies which have been conducted in the field investigated.

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model

The work conducted by Gardner in the area of motivation was largely influenced by Mowrer (1950, cited in Larson-Freeman and Long 1994), whose focus was on first language acquisition. Mowrer proposed that a child's success when learning a first language could be attributed to the desire to gain identity within the family unit and then the wider language community. Using this as the basis for his own research Gardner went on to investigate motivation as an influencing factor in L2 acquisition.

Before examining the effect of motivation on second language learning it is first important to realise that it is one variable, which, combined with other factors, influences a learner's success. Gardner (1982), in his socio-educational model, identified a number of factors which are interrelated when learning a second language. Unlike other research carried out in the area, Gardner's model looks specifically at second language acquisition in a structured classroom setting rather than a natural environment. His work focuses on the foreign language classroom. The model attempts to interrelate four features of second language acquisition. These include the social and cultural milieu, individual learner differences, the setting or context in which learning takes place and linguistic outcomes (Gardner 1982).

The social or cultural milieu refers to the environment in which an individual is situated, thus determining their beliefs about other cultures and language. It is these beliefs which have a significant impact on second language acquisition. An example of this can be seen in the monocultural setting of Britain, where many believe it is not necessary to learn another language and that minority groups should assimilate and become proficient in the dominant language of the country. The same can be said of many other predominantly monocultural communities throughout the world. However, in other countries such as Canada, bilingualism and biculturalism, are often encouraged within society (Ellis 1997). Gardner (1979, cited in Skehan 1993) suggests that expectations regarding bilingualism, combined with attitudes towards the target language and its culture, form the basis of an individual's attitude towards language learning.

The second phase of Gardner's model introduces the four individual differences which are believed to be the most influential in second language acquisition. These include the variables of intelligence, language aptitude, motivation and situational anxiety (Giles and Coupland 1991). Closely interrelated with these variables is the next phase of the model, referred to as the setting or context in which learning takes place. Two contexts are identified, namely formal instruction within the classroom and unstructured language acquisition in a natural setting. Depending upon the context, the impact of the individual difference variables alters. For example, in a formal setting intelligence and aptitude play a dominant role in learning, while exerting a weaker influence in an informal setting. The variables of situational anxiety and motivation are thought to influence both settings equally.

The final phase of the model identifies linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of the learning experience. Linguistic outcomes refers to

actual language knowledge and language skills. It includes test indices such as course grades or general proficiency tests. Non-linguistic outcomes reflect an individual's attitudes concerning cultural values and beliefs, usually towards the target language community. Ellis (1997) reasons that individuals who are motivated to integrate both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of the learning experience will attain a higher degree of L2 proficiency and more desirable attitudes.

Within the model, motivation is perceived to be composed of three elements. These include effort, desire and affect. Effort refers to the time spent studying the language and the drive of the learner. Desire indicates how much the learner wants to become proficient in the language, and affect illustrates the learner's emotional reactions with regard to language study (Gardner 1982).

Integrative Motivation

Motivation has been identified as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language (Crookes and Schmidt 1991). It is thought that students who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people that speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used (Falk 1978). This form of motivation is known as integrative motivation. When someone becomes a resident in a new community that uses the target language in its social interactions, integrative motivation is a key component in assisting the learner to develop some level of proficiency in the language. It becomes a necessity, in order to operate socially in the community and become one of its members. It is also theorised that "integrative motivation typically underlies successful acquisition of a wide range of registers and a nativelike pronunciation" (Finegan 1999:568).

In an EFL setting such as Japan it is important to consider the actual meaning of the term "integrative." As Benson (1991) suggests, a more appropriate approach to the concept of integrative motivation in the EFL context would be the idea that it represents the desire of the individual to become bilingual, while at the same time becoming bicultural. This occurs through the addition of another language and culture to the learner's own cultural identity. As Japan is predominantly a monocultural society, opportunities to use the target (L2) language in daily verbal exchanges are relatively restricted. There is also limited potential for integrating into the target language community.

Instrumental Motivation

In contrast to integrative motivation is the form of motivation referred to as instrumental motivation. This is generally characterised by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language (Hudson 2000). With instrumental motivation the purpose of language acquisition is more utilitarian, such as meeting the requirements for school or university graduation, applying for a job, requesting higher pay based on language ability, reading technical material, translation work or achieving higher social status. Instrumental motivation is often characteristic of second language acquisition, where little or no social integration of the learner into a community using the target language takes place, or in some instances is even desired.

Integrative vs Instrumental Motivation

While both integrative and instrumental motivation are essential elements of success, it is integrative motivation which has been found to sustain long-term success when learning a second language (Taylor, Meynard and Rheault 1977; Ellis 1997; Crookes et al 1991). In some of the early research conducted by Gardner and Lambert integrative motivation was viewed as being of more importance in a formal learning environment than instrumental motivation (Ellis 1997). In later studies, integrative motivation has continued to be emphasised, although now the importance of instrumental motivation is also stressed. However, it is important to note that instrumental motivation has only been acknowledged as a significant factor in some research, whereas integrative motivation is continually linked to successful second language acquisition. It has been found that generally students select instrumental reasons more frequently than integrative reasons for the study of language. Those who do support an integrative approach to language study are usually more highly motivated and overall more successful in language learning.

One area where instrumental motivation can prove to be successful is in the situation where the learner is provided with no opportunity to use the target language and therefore, no chance to interact with members of the target group. Lukmani (1972) found that an instrumental orientation was more important than an integrative orientation in non-westernized female learners of L2 English in Bombay. The social situation helps to determine both what kind of orientation learners have and what kind is most important for language learning. Braj Kachru (1977, cited in Brown 2000) also points out that in India, where English has become an international language, it is not uncommon for second language learners to be successful with instrumental purposes being the underlying reason for

study.

Brown (2000) makes the point that both integrative and instrumental motivation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Learners rarely select one form of motivation when learning a second language, but rather a combination of both orientations. He cites the example of international students residing in the United States, learning English for academic purposes while at the same time wishing to become integrated with the people and culture of the country.

Motivation is an important factor in L2 achievement. For this reason it is important to identify both the type and combination of motivation that assists in the successful acquisition of a second language. At the same time it is necessary to view motivation as one of a number of variables in an intricate model of interrelated individual and situational factors which are unique to each language learner.

Motivation in the Japanese Context

The issue of motivation and the successful acquisition of English in Japan is complex. One cannot simply observe input, in terms of the amount of time spent studying the language and then output, expressed as linguistic performance when investigating language learning. In order to examine language learning in the Japanese context it is necessary to explore a number of factors which contribute to the way in which English education is conducted in Japan. One of the most influential factors is that of the structure of university entrance exams which ultimately determine the institution to which a student gains acceptance. Due to the way these exams are structured, schools and instructors are forced to educate students in a manner which will prove most useful to them. Therefore, the focus of what is taught in secondary school is geared toward sitting such entrance examinations. These exams are a rigorous test of grammatical understanding of the English language, with students being required to translate complex passages and have knowledge of extensive vocabulary and grammatical structures (Morrow 1987). The focus of the exams is not directed toward the speaking and listening skills of students. For this reason schools see no need to prepare students for something which will not be examined. It has been suggested that having to undertake such university exams is the main reason or source of motivation for students studying English (LoCastro 1996). Certainly, a high percentage of both junior and senior high school students identify the major reason for English study as a necessity for achievement in examinations.

Research in Japan

In a study conducted by Berwick and Ross (1989), a group of 90 first-year Japanese university students enrolled in an international commerce and a compulsory English course were examined to determine their degree and form of motivation. The students were found to possess instrumental motivation, with the underlying reason for studying English being the entrance exam requirements for university. Typically, upon entrance to the desired establishment the student's interest to continue study declined. Prior to beginning the English class the students were tested for motivation, which was found to be low. However, on completion of 150 hours of class time the motivation level of students had improved. Some suggestions for this alteration in motivation included the use of a variety of instructional techniques and the recent adoption of an exchange program with an American sister university. This may have affected student perceptions and thus, their motivation to study the language.

In the same study (Berwick et al. 1989) it was proposed that motivation for studying English peaks in the final year of high school when students channel all their energy into studying for university entrance. Once students gain entrance to a university, motivation to continue English study is sometimes diminished . Many first-year students appear to have no academic purpose. In direct contrast to this, however, is the strong desire of many adults to once again resume study. This often takes place in the many private foreign language schools which provide classes at all hours of the day, catering for the busy employee who is often occupied until late in the evening. Some of the many reasons for the renewed interest of adults in studying include acquiring new skills necessary for the workplace and preparation for an overseas work transfer.

Benson (1991) noted that educators in Japan are often surprised by university student's lack of ability using spoken English, compared with that of their grammatical understanding of the language. He reported that university student's motivation to study English was often mixed. Some students appeared to be generally enthusiastic, but lacked application. Benson also found that some of the reasons suggested by students for English study could not be grouped as either integrative or instrumental forms of motivation. For this reason he constructed a third group labelled as "personal". This category included motivational reasons such as, "pleasure at being able to read English, and enjoyment of entertainment in English" (Benson 1991:36). The results from his study showed a preference for integrative and personal forms of motivation, even though this was restricted. Benson suggests that the student's rejection of instrumental motivation illustrates the view that students do not perceive English as having a vital role to play in their lives.

He also makes the point that the rejection of instrumental reasons for the study of English may indicate that the Japanese language is considered adequate for normal daily verbal exchange.

Discussion

From information brought to light by Morrow (1987) on English in the Japanese education system it would appear that little has changed in the past 13 years. The teaching of English in junior and senior high school is still directed toward preparing students for university entrance examinations. Therefore, the underlying motivation to study the language is largely instrumental. Morrow claims that many English teachers have poor listening and speaking skills, thus relying on their vocabulary and grammatical understanding of the English language. Although this may be true for many older professionals still engaged in the teaching of English, many younger teachers now entering the system appear to place greater emphasis on developing competency in all areas of the language. Some of these same teachers also work hard to incorporate greater use of oral English within the classroom. This can only work to motivate learners as they are exposed to English speaking Japanese teachers in the education system. Nakamura (1982, cited in Berwick et al. 1989) suggests that the Anglo-American instructors with whom students are presented can often instil psycho-social barriers to learning the English language. Perhaps in the past this may have been true, however with increasing numbers of communicatively competent Japanese teachers this is, perhaps, no longer valid.

Suggestions for Teachers

In order to make the language learning process a more motivating experience instructors need to put a great deal of thought into developing programs which maintain student interest and have obtainable short term goals. At university level this may include, as suggested by Berwick et al. (1989), any number of foreign exchange programs with other universities, overseas "homestay" programs, or any other activities which may help to motivate students to improve their target language proficiency. At the secondary school level, and especially in the senior years, this task may prove more difficult. With the focus of study being directed toward university entrance students may have little desire or indeed motivation to improve language proficiency. For the foreign language teacher this may result in a certain level of frustration due to the general lack of interest and commitment by some students. Teachers need to create interesting lessons in which the students attention is gained. This can sometimes be accomplished by the use of teaching strategies which are not often called upon by other teachers in mainstream subject areas. Encouraging students to become more active participants in a lesson can sometimes assist them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language. Successful communication using the target language should result in students feeling some sense of accomplishment. Research in the area suggests L2 achievement strongly affects learner motivation (Strong 1983, cited in Ellis 1997).

The use of an interesting text can also help to increase the motivation level of students in the classroom. Many Japanese texts often contain material which fails to capture the interest of students due to the heavy emphasis on vocabulary and grammar. Many foreign texts, however, which have been designed for EFL, and specifically the Japanese market, often contain topics which can create a great deal of classroom interaction and help to motivate students to develop their language skills. It is important for the instructor to take advantage of such discussion topics and help students to realise that, even though they may see no need to become proficient in a second language, the study of another language and culture can only enhance their perception and understanding of other cultures.

No matter what the underlying motivation to study a second language, what cannot be disputed is the fact that motivation is an important variable when examining successful second language acquisition. Japan is perhaps, a unique environment in which to learn English, especially when taking into consideration the many factors which influence the manner in which the language is taught. Although change may be slow to the education system, the introduction of the English language as a subject in elementary school, in the year 2002, can only help to further motivate students to achieve higher levels of proficiency in the future.

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