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Motivation:

An analysis of motivation in EFL with reference to the experience of the Japanese educational system

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Introduction

Motivation is not an independent factor in second language learning. It is one variable amongst many in the language learning process. Ellis (1985: 99) states that individual learner differences include characteristics such as age, learning style, aptitude, motivation and personality.

From my own experience, Japanese students in high school do not seem to willingly study English even though most of them attend 'cram' schools, which offer preparatory courses for entrance exams, taking lectures of English there after 'normal' school has finished. An important point to note in relation to the Japanese education system is that the Japanese university entrance examination in English emphasizes grammar, translation and reading skills, and de-emphasizes conversation skills, which might have a special effect on the motivation of students, since they realize that interaction with native English speakers is very limited while living in Japan. In the third chapter, the motivation of Japanese students in higher education will be discussed.

Over the past thirty years several studies on motivation have been conducted. Many researchers, such as Mowrer (1950), Spolsky (1969), Maslow (1970), Brown (1980), Gardner and Lambert (1959), (1972), Clement and Kruidenier (1983) have all published research in

this field.

The first chapter of this paper deals with some definitions of motivation. Various types of motivation have been identified by researchers, for example, intrinsic and instrumental motivation identified by Gardner and Lambert (1959), and some other important elements of motivation, are discussed in this chapter. Gardner and many other researchers have analyzed in their work ways in which motivation affects the acquisition of second language. Their findings are also discussed in this chapter. In addition to this, Maslow's (1970) psychological process involved in motivation are referred to.

The second chapter deals with the importance of motivation in SLA contexts. The relationship with other factors such as attitude, age, and personality are analyzed.

The third chapter discusses Japanese high school students' motivation in relation to my experience in Japanese education.

Motivation is an important determinant of learning and its outcomes. Motivation of learners is a complex matter. There might be many psychological and situational reasons why students are motivated and demotivated. Through research, this paper looks at various factors and dimensions of motivation in SLA.

I Definitions of Motivation

It is commonly agreed that there are difficulties in qualifying motivation. Brown (1980: 112) points out:

Motivation is probably the most often used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, motivation is 'the conscious or unconscious stimulus for action towards a desired goal provided by psychological or social factors; that which gives purpose or direction to behaviour'. That is, if one has his or her goal, one takes action resulting from mental stimulus.

From the psychological point of view, Maslow (1970) contends there are many parts of stages of human needs. One needs to regard motivation as a pyramid having a staged structure, which is explained by Maslow's hierarchy theory. Firstly, he contended there are psychological needs. There are needs for food, warmth, sex: basic human instincts. Secondly, safety needs, which are needs for security, protection from threat. Thirdly, acceptance needs, the needs to be accepted as a member of a society. Fourthly, esteem needs: to have a feeling of being useful and necessary in the world. This esteem is based on honest respect from others rather than on external fame. Fifthly, self-actualisation needs: even if all the above mentioned needs are satisfied, people are not satisfied unless they are doing what they are fitted for. The needs vary greatly from person to person; the musician seeks to play music, the poet seeks to write. Maslow believes that only when the lower needs are satisfied to a reasonable degree, do the higher needs emerge as motivators. Maslow sees motivation as a drive behind satisfying the needs of the individual. Thus when learning a language the learner will learn the language relevant to the individual's need. These needs are organized in a hierarchy and the individual will only be able to move on to a higher need when the prerequisite need has been satisfied.

In 1950, Mowrer attributed a child's success in acquiring his or her native language to the child's pursuit for identity, at first with members of the child's immediate family and then later with members of the larger speech community. Mowrer's view on individual development emphasized the importance of identification with a valued person.

Stimulated by Mowrer's idea of identification, Gardner and Lambert (1959) proposed the terms, 'integrative' and 'instrumental' motivation. Learners are said to be integratively motivated when they wish to identify with another ethnolinguistic group. Gardner and Lambert propose that those who positively wish to resemble the

foreign people in whom the learners are interested have integrative motivation. This identification would also involve understanding and taking part in the culture of the country where the target language is used. This is a particularly significant source of motivation because it is firmly based in the character and personalities of the learner. On the other hand, in the concept of instrumental motivation, the learner is motivated to learn a second language for utilitarian purposes, for example, furthering a career, improving social status, improving an ability to read useful materials in the target language, or fulfilling an educational requirement.

Gardner and Lambert hypothesized that integrative motivation would be a strong element in SLA in the long run. This hypothesis was deduced from their early studies in Canada and in certain contexts in the U.S. Furthermore, in 1969, Spolsky discovered that learners' greater desire to be like speakers of English rather than like speakers of their own language was closely related with students' proficiency in English. Spolsky (1969: 282) concluded:

learning a second language is a key to possible membership of a secondary society: the desire to join that group is a major factor in learning.

However, Gardner and Lamberts' theory that, integrative motivation is better than instrumental motivation, has been challenged. For example, students learning English as a second language in their Philippine research were highly successful in spite of their instrumental motivation. In another study, Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that instrumental motivation operated very well for French-speaking children living in Maine and attending an American high school. After such findings, Gardner and Lambert (1972: 141) seemed to have modified their view on motivation, that is, the universal superiority of integrative motivation.

It seems that in settings where there is an urgency about mastering a

second language — as in the Philippines and in North America for members of linguistic minority groups — the instrumental approach to language study is extremely effective.

For the explanation of the difficulties in deciding the superiority of either integrative or instrumental motivation, Clement and Kruidenier (1983) pointed out the ambiguity in the definitions of integrative and instrumental motivation.

Clement and Kruidenier (1983) suggested considering contextual factors. Someone studying a target language as a 'second' language was more likely to hope to integrate with the target-language community than someone for whom the target language was a 'foreign' language. Clement and Kruidenier concluded that there is no clear justification for belief in the generality and totality of the integrative-instrumental distinction. This opinion was supported by Hidalgo (1986) who studied language attitudes of habitants of Juarez, a Mexican city which is on the border with the U.S. In their research, there was no evidence of the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation. Ely (1986) found two influential attitudinal elements in a study of first year university students of Spanish: one identifiable as integrative and one as instrumental.

As one of the variables of motivation, Strong (1984) comments on resultative motivation. Strong finds that the learners' integrative motivation increases in relation to their English language proficiency. He contends that motivation does not always facilitate acquisition, but rather results from it, and those who succeed in second language acquisition are more motivated to study.

Genesee, Rogers and Holobow (1983: 220) have discovered another aspect of the relationship between motivation and context. They stress the social context of the relevance of proficiency in the target language. In their research, English-speaking Canadian students were asked both why they were learning French and why they thought French-speaking Canadians wanted them to learn French.

The results indicated that the learners' expectations of motivational support from the target language group emerged as significant, and in some cases, the expectations were predictors of the learners' second language achievement. Genesee, Rogers and Holobow surmised that social-psychological factors in second language acquisition need to be considered more seriously than had previously been the case.

Definitions of motivation have been changing for over thirty years. It can be said that motivation needs to be examined with other features, such as attitude, personality or age to obtain a clearer picture of the significance of motivation in second language acquisition. The relationships between these elements are discussed in the next chapter.

II The Importance of Motivation in the Context of SLA

In this chapter, the role of motivation is considered through various related factors such as attitude, age, and personality.

Attitude

When considering second language acquisition, attitude is one of the significant elements. For example, Savignon (1976: 295) claims:

attitude is the single most important factor in second language learning.

Brown (1981: 127) states that attitudes develop early in childhood. These are similar to aspects of the development of perceptions and emotions in humans. Brown continues that one's attitudes are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes, the result of contact with people who are different in a number of ways, or the result of interacting emotional factors in one's experience. These attitudes form a part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture in which one lives.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) systematically examined the effect of

attitudes on language learning. After studying the relationships of a number of different types of attitudes, they defined motivation as a construction made up of certain attitudes. They state that the most important of these attitudes is the group-specific one, that is, the attitude the learner has toward the members of the cultural group whose language the learner is studying. This attitude has a connection with the learners' attitude toward their own native culture, their degree of ethnocentrism, and the extent to which they prefer their own language to the one they are learning as a second language.

There is a generally held opinion that positive attitudes toward language learning bring about successful language acquisition. Scherer and Wertheimer (1964) showed that American college students' positive attitudes towards Germans and towards themselves speaking German were correlated with proficiency in German.

However, it has been postulated that attitudinal factors have relatively little influence on SLA in children, since attitudes are not fully developed in young learners. Macnamara (1973: 37) provides the following example:

A child suddenly transported from Toronto to Berlin will learn German no matter what he thinks of Germans.

Furthermore, Genesee and Hamayan (1980) found no relationship between attitude factors and proficiency in French of six-year-old English-speaking Canadians.

Related to the above mentioned situation, there is research that shows that positive attitudes do not always lead to success. Oller, Hudson and Liu (1977) reported that Chinese-speaking students in the U.S. who had generally positive attitudes towards the target-language group were more proficient in English learning on a cloze test. However, there is a case which has shown different results. Oller, Baca and Vigil (1977) found that a population of Mexican-American women living in Albuquerque, New Mexico had positive

attitudes towards learning English, but they did less well on an English cloze test. Oller, Baca and Vigil attributed the differences in findings between the two studies to the fact that the Chinese were from a high socioeconomic class and were living in the U.S. by their own choice. On the other hand, they pointed out that the women were members of a lower socioeconomic class and might have felt themselves to be a colonized minority and may have felt resentment towards the English-speaking majority. In spite of their resentment, they were very eager to learn English to remove themselves from oppressive conditions which were caused by their lack of English proficiency. Therefore, there is a case in which positive attitudes interfere with second language acquisition.

Gardner's explanation might give the answer for these contradictory results. Gardner (1980) insists that different social context would have influenced the results. He examined English-speaking Canadian students learning French as a second language in a bilingual context. The effect of attitudes was much stronger in a case where there were many more opportunities for the learners to interact with target language speakers than in a context where the opportunities were more limited.

Thus, it can be inferred when learners are favourably disposed towards the target language, they are likely to succeed in the learning. From his research, Littlewood (1984: 56) makes the following point:

successful learners developed favourable attitudes as the course progressed, and in their turn, these attitudes encouraged more success.

As Littlewood says, learners with more favourable attitudes would hope for more contact with the target language community. The learners of Mexican-American in Oller, Baca and Vigil's research had unfavourable attitudes towards the target language, therefore there might have been strong internal obstacles against learning.

Age

Age is also one variable to be considered in second language acquisition. Age, unlike other determinants of language acquisition, can be measured precisely. In this section, a notion that children are better language learners than adults is considered through much research by Cazden et al. (1975), Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978), Ellis (1985).

Cazden et al. (1975) found that children, adolescent, and adult learners went through the same language learning process. They suggested that learners make linguistic progress in the same way, irrespective of how old they are. If this opinion is proved, maintaining the motivation of learners would not be difficult, whatever age they might be.

However, Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) suggested that the learners who progress most rapidly may be adolescents. In their research of L2 learners of Dutch, they found that the learners of 15 years and older outperformed the ones of 6 to 10 years, while the teenagers of 12 to 15 years learned faster than both.

Ellis (1985: 106) summarized the importance of age, saying that:

Where grammar and vocabulary are concerned, adolescent learners do better than either children or adults.

But this does not mean that children and adults are far inferior to adolescents in language learning. Ellis (1985: 106) suggests exposure to the target language over a number of years brings about communicative fluency to learners of all generations.

From the research mentioned in this section, it can be hypothesized that age is an important factor, but not an absolute one if exposure to the target language is long enough. In addition, it can be said that if the learners have favourable attitudes, they can, whatever their age, achieve communicative proficiency. Therefore, age should not necessary be an obstacle to the motivation of learners.

Personality

It is often said that an extrovert person is well suited to second language learning. Tucker et al. (1976) supported this opinion. They found that success in second language acquisition correlated with learners who have traits of extroversion such as assertiveness and adventurousness.

Littlewood (1984: 64) suggests that people with an outgoing personality might achieve success in language learning, and commented that 'they may perform more confidently in communication situations, whichever language they are using'.

Other than this research on extroversion, Guiora et al. (1975) comment that learners with a high capacity for empathy, such as the capacity to appreciate other people's thoughts and feelings, may perform better in mastering pronunciation, because the way a person speaks is closely associated with his sense of identity. Guiora et al. state that empathy might help a learner to step outside his present identity in order to adopt new patterns of behaviour. Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that an English-speaking Canadian's positive attitude toward French-Canadians lead to high integrative motivation to learn French because the learners had a desire to understand them, and to empathize with them. Therefore, learners with personalities which empathize with the people of their target language should be able to succeed in language learning because of their integrative motivation.

In this chapter, attitude, age, and personality were discussed in relation to motivation. Through these analyses, we saw the importance of motivation in second language acquisition.

In the next chapter, from my experience as a high school teacher in Japan, I will discuss the motivation of Japanese students in language learning.

III Motivation: from my experience in Japanese education

High school students in Japan seem to be caught up in a compulsory language learning experience whatever their motivation. The students, however, do not always perceive a purpose for this experience.

From my experience as a high school teacher in Japan, it seems that Japanese students stop studying English after they enter a university. This situation might be related to the type of motivation they have. In general, they regard English study purely as an academic pursuit, rather than as a language for human-interaction or personal enrichment.

Cogan et al. (1988:295) researched the attitudes of Japanese high school students towards foreign language study. They commented:

The results show that most of the Japanese tested do not believe that foreign language study is especially important for them personally.

These attitudes held by Japanese students, which are caused by high school experience of English, still remain after they enter university. As for this tendency, Berwick and Ross (1989: 193) suggest that motivation towards English peaks in the last year of high school, as the entrance exams approach, and suffers a decline through university life.

The tendency that Japanese high school students have, to study English mostly for the university entrance examination, is discussed by LoCastro. LoCastro (1994: 412) found that exam preparation was students' primary motivation in high school, and their main strategy was memorization. One reason for this memorization is the entrance examination of English at universities in Japan. Morrow (1987) states that Japanese universities' entrance exams of English have a strong emphasis on grammar and reading, and effectively control what is taught in high schools. English has become a subject where success

relies mainly on skills of memorization. Japanese entrance exams of grammar and reading check how well students remember taught items. In an exam of a high school, it is often the case that students have to learn by rote all the sentences taught during classes.

Buck (1988) criticizes this situation, saying that there seems to be no practical reason, at the very least, why listening tests could not be incorporated into the entrance exams. With the spread of English as an international language, there is a strong need for oral skills. Thus, acquisition of speaking and listening skills would be indispensable. After understanding the importance of studying English, students' motivation would remain after entering university. There is a finding that shows hope for such a change. LoCastro (1994: 412) found that the motivation of high school students changed in his research:

Respondents thought that their motivation changed while at the university, when they began to want to learn English as a language of international communication. At this time, they made more efforts to use the language, to take risks, and to go abroad.

Thus, recent research indicates the gradual change of Japanese students' motivation, and points to the dynamic quality of motivation. As I mentioned in chapter one, a person's motivation could change according to his needs. Motivation of the students remains if teachers can show them that English is a language of international communication. Therefore, it is important to consider how students perceive the status of the language.

Conclusion

Through chapters one, two, and three, various characteristics of motivation were discussed.

In chapter one, definitions of motivation were given. Maslow's (1970) psychological factors, and Gardner and Lambert's (1959) integral and instrumental motivation were stated. The ambiguity of the

definitions of integral and instrumental motivation were pointed out by Clement and Kruidenier (1983), and the importance of learning contexts was indicated by them and by other researchers. Definitions of motivation have changed over the past thirty years and it was found that motivation may now be regarded as a body of complex elements.

In chapter two, the role of motivation was considered through related factors such as attitude, age, and personality. The research of Gardner and Lambert (1972) showed that students' positive attitudes towards second language acquisition lead to integrative motivation and stated students' empathy with the people of the target language. Furthermore, Littlewood (1984) found successful learners developed favourable attitudes towards the target language as the course progressed. The research of Gardner (1980) and Littlewood (1984) support Guiora et al.'s (1975) idea of personality. Guiora et al. stated that learners with a high capacity for empathy, that is, the emotion of understanding other people's thoughts and feelings, may obtain better results in language learning. As for age, it was also found to be a factor which affected outcome in SLA.

In chapter three, the motivation of high school students in Japan was discussed. Japanese high school students showed their motivation to learn English decreased after entering university. This was related to the limited usage of English in their country. They regard English as an academic pursuit rather than a language for interaction with other people. However, recent research by LoCastro (1984) shows that there still remains a hope for change in the motivation of Japanese high school students as they begin to see English as a language of human interaction. Thus, as motivation changes during the process of language acquisition, it is necessary for teachers to recognize their students' motivation as precisely as they can. Teachers also need to take into account students' personalities and analyze their attitudes, age, and other elements that relate to the language

learning process.

More research on motivation by researchers would give learners of second language greater help to learn English effectively. It is hoped that research on motivation will be continued in order to analyze more closely the meaning and significance of motivation in SLA, which ultimately is a combination of various factors related to language learning.

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