

The Roles of Attitude and Motivation in Second and Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the roles of attitude and motivation in second and foreign language learning and to provide some supporting evidence for the purpose of illustration. Since research has shown that both are variables which can enhance success in second and foreign language learning, increasing students' interests and motivation in language learning is really a challenge for teachers. To help teachers effectively handle such a challenge, this paper also presents some motivational strategies suggested by some major theorists and researchers.

Introduction

One simple question that has been a subject of interest for years is: Why is it that some people can learn a second or foreign language easily and successfully while others, given the same opportunity to learn, find it difficult or almost impossible? Many researchers (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993a, 1993b; Gardner, Masgoret, and Tremblay, 1999; Gardner and Tremblay, 1994; Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret, 1997; Schmidt, Boraie, and Kassabgy, 1996; Dornyei, 1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1998; among others) agree that apart

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from intelligence and aptitude, the learner's attitudes towards speakers of the language being learned and motivation to learn the second language (L2, hereafter) also account for success or failure in L2 learning.

Definition of Attitude and Motivation

An attitude may be defined as an original and consistent manner of thinking, feeling, and reacting to people, groups, social issues or, more generally, to any event in the environment (Lambert & Lambert, 1973, cited in Lambert, 1987). It is presumed to be highly variable from person to person and from one time to another for any person (Lambert, 1987). It forms a part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture one lives in (Brown, 1980).

Motivation, on the other hand, can be defined as an inner drive impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action (Brown, 1980). It is interesting to note here that while Brown (1980, p. 112) stated that motivation is probably "the most often used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task," Wall (1985, p. 23) mentioned that it is perhaps "the most obscure and difficult of all theoretical issues in general and educational psychology."

With regard to the relationship between attitude and motivation, one may say that an interpretation of the role of attitude and motivation in L2 learning is somewhat interrelated, rather than totally distinguished from each other. As postulated by Gardner and Lambert (1972), success in mastering a foreign language would depend not only on intellectual capacity and language aptitude but also on the learner's attitudes towards that group. The learner's motivation for language learning, then, would be determined by his attitudes and readiness to identify and by his orientation to the whole process of learning a foreign language.

Attitude and L2 Learning

Lambert (1987) claimed that favorable attitudes towards L2 and the speakers of L2 lead to successful L2 learning, while negative or prejudiced attitudes can upset and disturb the motivation to learn L2 and

thus may obstruct success in L2 learning. In young children who have not yet developed strong positive or negative feelings towards L2 and speakers of L2, there is evidence that the attitudes of parents affect children's attitude and motivation. Gardner (cited in McLaughlin, 1985) found that parents who had positive attitudes towards French Canadians who were the target language group developed the same attitudes in their children, and these children were more proficient in L2 than the children of parents with less favorable attitudes. In addition, persistence in language study and eagerness to interact in language classes were related to the attitudes and motivation children bring to school (Lambert, 1987). As for negative attitudes, parents who have negative or prejudiced attitudes towards L2 also impose similar attitudes on their children, which may influence the academic and language identity of their children (Lambert, 1987).

However, it should be noted here that negative attitudes do not always impede success in L2 learning. Instead, in some cases, they may also account for the reason why people become bilingual. McLaughlin (1985), for example, stated that although many parents belonging to minority groups may have negative attitudes towards L2 as they may feel inferior to the dominant group, they still want their children to learn the language of the dominant group so that their children will have a better future.

The fact that favorable attitudes towards L2 and L2 speakers lead to success in L2 learning and that negative attitudes may obstruct L2 learning also holds true for adults. Oller et al. (1977), in their study of Chinese-speaking foreign students at American universities, found that attitudes towards the target language group were positively correlated with proficiency. Taylor et al. (cited in Lambert, 1987) found that the learning of English could pose a threat to personal and cultural identity for French Canadian university students and this threat could hinder the progress made in L2 learning. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that one's attitude may change as a result of L2 learning. Lambert (1987), for example, found that as English-speaking Canadian children moved through 4 or 5 years in French immersion programs, they liked French people more and even said that they would be "just as happy" if they had been born into a French family. On the other hand, Gardner et al. (1979) found in their study that Canadian and American students

taking an intensive French program in Quebec developed less favorable attitudes towards French Canadians and towards L2 learning.

Motivation and L2 Learning

Like attitude, motivation also plays an essential role in determining achievement in L2 learning. There are two kinds of motivation associated with L2 learning as suggested by Gardner and Lambert (1972)—instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation refers to motivation to acquire a language as a means for attaining instrumental goals like furthering a career, reading technical material, and translation. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, refers to motivation to integrate oneself within the culture of the L2 group, to identify oneself with and become a part of that society. Brown (1980) further noted that it is possible to be both instrumentally and integratively motivated with different contexts and expectations. Gardner and Lambert (1972) claimed that those who were integratively motivated would be more successful in L2 learning than those who were instrumentally motivated. This claim is supported by Wong Fillmore (cited in McLaughlin, 1984). In her study of five Spanish-speaking children learning English, Wong Fillmore found that the child who had a strong desire to be associated with the English-speaking children learned English faster than the others. However, there are also researchers who claimed that instrumental motivation can also account for success in L2 learning. Braj Kachru (cited in Brown, 1980) stated that English in India could be acquired very successfully for instrumental reasons alone. Lukmani (1972) also found in her study that among Marathi-speaking Indian students learning English in India, those who had higher instrumental motivation performed better in English proficiency tests.

The notion about the direction of causality is also worth mentioning here. Although it seems that motivation results in successful L2 learning, successful L2 learning can also cause motivation (McLaughlin, 1985). In other words, motivation can be both the cause and effect of becoming or staying bilingual. Hermann (1980), in her study of 750 German children learning English as L2, found that those who had more experience with English showed significantly more positive attitudes

towards the English culture than did the beginners. Strong (1984), too, found that children who were more fluent in English showed a significantly stronger desire to associate with members of the L2 group than did less fluent ones.

Motivational Strategies in L2 or Foreign Language Classrooms

As attitude and motivation can contribute to success in L2 learning, it follows then that increasing interests and motivation among L2 learners should be one of the challenges for L2 teachers. In order to help teachers effectively implement a motivation-increasing teaching approach, this paper will present some motivational strategies as proposed by some theorists and researchers.

Among advocates of motivational strategies for L2 teachers to use in their classroom teaching are Williams and Burden (1997, pp. 141-142), who offered 12 suggestions for motivating language learners as follows:

1. Recognize the complexity of motivation.
2. Be aware of both initiating and sustaining motivation.
3. Discuss with learners why they are carrying out activities.
4. Involve learners in making decisions related to learning the language.
5. Involve learners in setting language-learning goals.
6. Recognize people as individuals.
7. Build up individuals' beliefs in themselves.
8. Develop internal beliefs.
9. Help to move towards a mastery-oriented style.
10. Enhance intrinsic motivation.
11. Build up a supportive learning environment.
12. Give feedback that is informational.

Dornyei and Csizer (1998, p. 215) developed what they called the "Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners" as a set of core strategies for teachers to extend when the techniques have become sufficiently internalized and automated. They are:

1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalise the learning process.
9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarise learners with the target language culture.

Conclusion

Since attitude and motivation play a significant role in success in L2 learning, enhancing interest and motivation among students should be regarded as an integral part in L2 classroom. Therefore, it is vital for L2 teachers to design motivational strategies for their classroom teaching, which will contribute to success in L2 and foreign language classroom teaching in the long run.

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