

# Motivational influences affecting the development of L2 motivation of Japanese learners of English

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## 1. Introduction

This paper reports briefly a part of my PhD thesis (Shibuya, 2010), an exploratory study of the development of the second language (L2) motivation of Japanese students learning English as a foreign language at university. The study examined how Japanese students' motivation for learning English developed from their first exposure to the language to the present (university), adopting a qualitatively-dominant mixed methods approach (qualitative analysis of interview and quantitative analysis of questionnaire data). In the analysis, a group of the students identified, by retrospective self-report on degree of their intensity of their willingness to learn English, as 'motivated' were targeted and compared, both within the group and with a 'less motivated' group, with regard to their motivational development over time.

In this paper, I report a summary of one of the qualitative analyses of the interview data done in the study: motivational influences affecting the development of L2 motivation of Japanese learners of English. Firstly, the research questions are presented. This is followed by the research design. Third, analysis of the interview data is summarised, followed by discussions and conclusion.

## 2. Focus of the study and research questions

As studies have indicated (e.g., NHK, 1995; Somusho, 2001; Hayashi, 2005), Japanese students spend less time studying or are less willing to study

English while at university than in previous periods of their education. However, an apparently small number of students do sustain their high level of motivation for learning English at university. My study focuses on these, since to examine such students, who can be seen as ideal learners as regards motivation, may illuminate important questions such as why and how some students are able to keep their motivation high at university while others are not. The purpose of the study was then to gain a better understanding of how the L2 motivation of these highly-motivated university students has developed over the course of their whole educational career, from junior high school (or even earlier for some students) to university. One of the research questions proposed for the exploratory study concerned social and cognitive motivational components or factors affecting motivation for learning English. I sought to explore those motivational influences which seem effective in developing Japanese students' motivation over time, proposing the following research questions:

1. **What motivational influences seem effective in enhancing, sustaining, and developing 'motivated' students' willingness for learning English from their childhood to the present in Japanese educational contexts?**
2. **How did these motivational influences serve to develop their motivation for studying English over time?**

### **3. Research design**

#### **3.1 Qualitatively dominant mixed methods approach**

I adopted a mixed-methods approach for my study, with greater emphasis placed on the qualitative dimension. This is, first, because qualitative and quantitative studies “are not mutually exclusive” as Denscombe points out. “Good research tends to use parts of both approaches, and the difference lies in the degree to which the research is based in one camp or the other” (Denscombe, 1998: 173). Second, employing mixed methods can enhance the quality of the research and strengthen the validity of findings (*ibid.*: 84-5). Another reason for using mixed-method approaches is the growing recognition and great potential of such approaches in L2 motivation research (Dörnyei, 2001: 242). My study

seeks to understand how individual learners' understanding of their learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom affected their motivational development. The subjective interpretations which individual students attributed to events or experiences in their life histories seemed to play an important role in promoting their motivational development. A qualitative approach, which carefully investigates an individual's 'subjective account' of events and experiences, is suitable for such a study; one of the characteristics of a qualitative approach is that it takes into account the diverse perspectives of the participants (Flick, 2002). This is why my study is predominantly qualitative rather than quantitative.

### 3.2 Theoretical perspectives

This predominantly qualitative exploratory study does not rely on any explicit theory as a starting point but instead applies an inductive approach to theories: "theory (or some other broad explanation) becomes the *end point* for a study" (Creswell, 2003: 132). The study follows "an inductive process of building from the data to broad themes to a generalized model or theory" (*ibid.*). Theories of L2 motivation from the literature were still reviewed, however, providing a theoretical lens or perspective "to guide the researcher as to what issues are important to examine and the people that need to be studied" (*ibid.*: 131).

One of the theoretical perspectives that guide this study is a cognitive view of L2 motivation, in which "student thought processes play a central role, mediating and shaping involvement in learning" (Ushioda, 1996: 12-13). Emphasis is thus placed upon "the ways in which individuals make sense of their learning experiences and are seen as being motivated primarily by their conscious thoughts and feelings" (Williams and Burden, 1997:112). In this framework, people are seen as active participants in deciding how to behave on the basis of the sense they make of their world. Furthermore, it is assumed in my study that "learners make their own sense of their world, but they do so within a *social context*, and through *social interactions*" (*ibid.*: 28). Individual learners' L2 motivation is thus seen as subject to social and contextual influences as well as their own sense of the world. In other words, L2 motivation is seen in my study as influenced

both by *internal factors* (individual learners' own sense of the world) and *external factors* (mediating influences such as mediators and significant others, and contextual influences such as the society and the culture of the world surrounding them).

### 3.3 A two-phase design

The study applied a two-phase design for data collection. In phase 1, a questionnaire was administered, and on the basis of the responses interviewees were selected by the researcher. In phase 2, these interviewees were invited to participate in two sets of qualitative interviews.

### 3.4 Sampling

#### 3.4.1 Questionnaire respondents

The participants who took part in the questionnaire were the students to whom I was allowed to administer the questionnaire in class by the university in January 2005. As a result, the participants were 350 first to fourth year students (first year: 261; second year: 18; third year: 52; and fourth year: 19) (male: 148; female: 202) (( ) indicates the number of the participants).

#### 3.4.2 'Motivated' (and 'less motivated') learners

The questionnaire was used to identify two broad categories of students: those who were motivated to learn English and those who were less motivated. 'Motivated' learners in the study were identified by the questionnaire, more specifically, the respondents' perceived intensity of will or willingness to learn English (hereafter referred to as 'Perceived Intensity of Motivation'). In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to rate to what extent they perceived they were (in the present and in the past) willing to learn English on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'very much' for each period of junior high school, high school, and university (the present). In the study, the learners who rated 4 ('quite a lot') or 5 ('very much') are described as 'motivated' learners and those who rated 3 ('so-so'), 2 ('not really'), or 1 ('not at all') are identified as 'less motivated' learners. Of the 350 participants for the questionnaire,

116 were identified as ‘motivated’ learners of English at university, while 234 were ‘less motivated’ learners.

Cluster analysis (Ward’s clustering method with squared Euclidean) applied to time-wise patterns of Perceived Intensity of Motivation of these ‘motivated’ learners revealed that they could be divided into three subgroups: a ‘High-High’ group, whose intensity of motivation was consistently high from junior high school to university; a ‘Low-High’ group, whose intensity of motivation was low at junior high school but increased thereafter; and a ‘High-Low-High’ group, whose intensity of motivation was high at junior high school, but fell at high school, and rose again at university. In the analysis of the interview data, the learners in these groups (22 interviewees from the ‘High-High’ group, 9 from the ‘Low-High’ group, and 10 from the ‘High-Low-High’ group) were examined separately since they were assumed to have had different motivational experiences.

### 3.4.3 Interviewees

Participants for interviews were selected from among those who took part in the questionnaire on the basis of the data gained from the questionnaire. The selection was made in order to ensure a variety of experience in the sample, “since it increased the potential range of motivational perspectives to be yielded by a small learner sample” (Ushioda, 2001: 98). The academic faculty, the year of university, gender, and the developmental process of Perceived Intensity of Motivation were taken into consideration in selecting the sample. As a result, 51 interviewees were finally selected: 41 ‘motivated’ and 10 ‘poorly motivated’ learners. Interviewees included 19 males and 34 females; 34 first year, 6 second year, 5 third year, and 6 fourth year students; 24 from the Faculty of Education, 13 from Medicine, 11 from Engineering, and 3 from Social and Information Studies.

## 3.5 Conducting interviews

In order to collect the data for the qualitative analysis, two sets of interviews were held for each interviewee, separated by approximately two months. The first interview was held from the end of January to the middle of February 2005,

and the second from the end of February to the middle of April 2005. 51 participants took part in the first interview, and 39 (around 76.5%) in the second.

In the first round of interviews, the participants were asked: (1) questions about their personal history of learning English from the first exposure of the language; (2) questions about episodes or events which contributed to developing their L2 motivation; (3) structured questions about their language-learning and language-related experiences. In the second round of interviews, they reported about the latter two of these.

#### 4. Analysis of the interview data

The main focus of the analysis of the data from narrative interviews is upon the sequential process of events or experiences related to the development of L2 motivation. The goal of the analysis was, firstly, to make a detailed description of the biographical process of individual participants' L2 learning motivation: how their L2 motivation had developed from the junior high school to the present; secondly, to identify chronologically events or experiences identified as 'meaningful' in the development of participants' L2 motivation, and to disclose how they understood or interpreted these events or experiences; and, thirdly, to examine what factors were involved in their motivational development over the course of their educational career.

The data from interviews was analysed by means of coding which includes various types of codes: *descriptive*, *interpretive*, and *pattern* codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). A provisional 'start list' of codes was created prior to fieldwork, based on the theoretical perspectives of my study, drawing mainly upon both Dörnyei (1994) and William and Burdett's (1997) models. These codes were revised to fit and account well for the phenomenon being studied through coding analysis. This was 'inductive coding', whereby patterns, commonality, and differences between cases and sub-groups within cases were identified, with regard to factors relevant to the developmental process of L2 motivation. Through the process of identifying motivational influences and categorising them, these influences were finally categorised into two main dimensions: internal factors

and external factors. More specifically:

- *Internal influences* encompassed various elements related to cognitive and affective aspects of the L2 learners, consisting of enjoyment/pleasure, interest in English-language culture, interest in English for communication, perceived competence, goals, perceived necessity/usefulness, self-management, and perceived personal value and relevance.
- *External influences* involved social, contextual, and pedagogical elements related to the L2 learners' learning environment, consisting of teachers/teaching, family members and friends, and the learning environment inside/outside school.

Internal influences might be broadly classified into three main groups: (1) Affect group: Enjoyment/pleasure, Interest in English-language culture, and Interest in English for communication, related to learners' affective and emotional dimensions; (2) Cognition group: Perceived competence, Perceived necessity/usefulness and Perceived personal value, associated with learners' perception and cognition; (3) Self-regulation group: Goals and Self-management, related to learners' self-regulation in their learning and motivation. These influences, however, are interrelated, and consequently interconnections between influences in different groups could be identified. For example, Perceived competence may be closely related to affective disposition as well. Or Perceived personal value may involve Enjoyment/pleasure, since we can gain a deep satisfaction which could be considered another form of pleasure and enjoyment when we perceive learning English as personally important. Furthermore, interest may be also associated with a cognition group factor such as Perceived personal value, as Krapp (2003: 64) points out: "A central criterion of the interest construct is the close combination of value-oriented and emotional components".

An in-depth content analysis provided an extensive list of motivational influences, categorised into two dimensions. It is not claimed however that the influences and categorisations identified are definitive or conclusive. Inevitably, those influences and categories identified on the basis of my own interpretation are somewhat arbitrary and subjective, and it is certainly likely that numerous ways of analysing and interpreting the data are possible, thereby enabling

identification of other influences and categories.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to explore motivational influences which seemed to have a positive impact on enhancing and sustaining Japanese students' motivation for learning English, and to examine how these motivational influences served as positive factors to promote and develop their motivation. Analysis of interview data identified two different types of influence as effective factors to promote and develop 'motivated' learners' willingness to study English: *Internal influences*, composed of eight sub-types; and *External influences*, classified into three categories.

What is important with regard to *Internal influences* is that 'motivated' learners' motivation for learning English was shaped by a collaboration of these internal influences rather than by the independent operation of each, although each of these influences possesses its own function and attribute as a motivational factor. This result seems roughly to reflect the results of quantitative analysis of 'Orientations' (Shibuya, 2010), in that L2 motivation is shaped by a combination of multiple affective and cognitive factors, particularly at university. Judging by these results gained from both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the development of multiple motivational factors would seem to be essential for students, especially at university, to sustain high and stable motivation.

Mutually-interrelated internal influences formed a constitutive organic system which comprises cognitive, affective, and self-regulative functions to enhance and sustain 'motivated' learners' motivation. While these influences could be broadly categorised into three groups in terms of their functions in the system (cognition, affection, and self-organisation), each remains interrelated with the others beyond group boundaries.

'Cognition group' is related to cognitive and perceptual functions in the development of motivation, composed of Perceived competence, Perceived necessity/usefulness and Perceived Personal value. 'Motivated' learners were those who were likely to perceive necessity, usefulness, or value of learning

English and personal effectiveness in learning it. It should be noted that ‘motivated’ learners discovered ‘their own’ necessity or ‘personally important’ value in learning English, rather than simply understanding in abstract the importance and necessity of learning it. In other words, they were those who could successfully make a ‘personally meaningful’ connection between the self and learning English. Whether learners can perceive ‘personal relevance’ to learning English seems to be essential in promoting their motivation. The participants in the questionnaire in general tended to feel that competence in English is useful and important for the future because of ‘globalisation’ or ‘internationalisation’, and seemed largely to have developed an international outlook of the sort characterised as ‘International Orientation’ by Nakata (1995a, 1995b) or ‘International Posture’ by Yashima, (2002), whereby they tended to see themselves as connected to the international community and to possess a readiness to communicate with people in the outside world. What is different as between these students as a group and the ‘motivated’ minority of learners is that the latter perceived using English in the future as a personal ‘reality’, through personal experiences they had in and outside university. ‘Globalisation’ or ‘internationalisation’ was more real to ‘motivated’ than to ‘less motivated’ learners. The perceived likelihood of using English in the future seemed to allow them to see a ‘personal relevance’ to learning and using it. It is to be stressed once again that these ‘motivated’ learners were more likely to gain such a perception, and increased awareness of an international perspective, through their private experiences both in and outside school or university, rather than during the lessons. Moreover, they were likely to develop such an outlook only gradually during and, most likely, before university, suggesting that it may take a number of years, and various kinds of personal language-learning and language-related experience, for learners to develop such a sense of ‘reality’ with regard to using English in the future and of ‘personal relevance’ to learning it.

‘Affect group’ is associated with the emotional aspects of the operational system driving students’ motivational behaviour, involving Enjoyment/pleasure, Interest in English-language or Anglophone cultures, and Interest in English for communication. Even though learners might perceive the importance and necessity

of learning English, it would be difficult to continue to learn it if they could not gain any enjoyment or interest from doing so. Learners in the ‘motivated’ group were found to be most likely to have had numerous positive language-learning experiences from which they had gained positive feelings such as enjoyment, pleasure, sense of success or sense of competence over the course of learning, which seemed greatly to enhance their intrinsic motivation. Learners of the ‘High-High’ group, for example, recalled many good experiences, rich in positive feelings, from the early stages of learning English and had thereby developed intrinsic motivation, initiating their learning smoothly it seemed, and establishing a virtuous circle for subsequent learning and motivation. This early development of their intrinsic motivation seemed moreover to play a vital long-term role, reflecting Ushioda’s observation to the effect “motivation that is intrinsic is by definition self-sustaining” (1996: 49). Analysis of ‘orientations’ meanwhile revealed similar results: intrinsic orientation of ‘motivated’ learners, especially those of the ‘High-High’ group, were significantly higher at junior high school than that of ‘less motivated’ learners, even in the context of generally high motivational intensity of both groups.

‘Self-regulation’ relates to learners’ self-management in learning and motivation, encompassing Self-management and Goals. Even if learners can enjoy learning English and feel it to be personally important, they might find difficulty in sustaining their motivation if they cannot gain good results from learning because of lack of the capacity to manage it well. Good results are most likely to be obtained by those who are able to manage their learning in a reflective way, involving planning, monitoring, review, and evaluation; ‘motivated’ learners in the study moreover tended to find their own learning method and put it into practice as well as to planning their learning and reviewing the results reflectively. They were likely to set clear short- and longer-term goals in order to realise their ultimate goals. They were also likely to view and think of their learning and its results in a flexible and positive manner; and such an attitude towards their language-learning experiences seemed to be very effective in sustaining their motivation, especially in the face of negative experiences such as boring and difficult lessons, bad grades and results, or examination pressure.

From qualitative analysis it was possible to delineate a cognitive, affective, and self-regulative synthesis as an essential condition of ‘motivated’ students’ high and stable motivation: cognitive, affective, and self-regulative internal influences, closely interrelated working together rather than independently. This is a picture of internal influences that differs distinctly from that of motivational factors or components in positivist hypothetico-deductive models and theories. In such models and theories these factors and components are seen and treated as measurable indices, serving as independent variables affecting motivated behaviours; and *which* factors or components are more significant in affecting motivation is often a central concern. Results from qualitative analysis may suggest however that more research focusing on a synthesis of cognition, affection, and self-regulation and a complex interrelation of motivational factors may be needed to explore effectively the complex and dynamic phenomenon of L2 motivation.

Mutually interrelated and actively interplaying, internal influences changed qualitatively through social interaction with mediators such as teachers, parents, or friends within a language-learning environment inside extending well beyond school or university. Internal influences can thus be seen as developmental rather than stable within the individual; and can be positively involved in the developmental process of self-concept, or the self as a L2 learner and user. For example, when a would-be teacher newly found a personally important need for learning English and discovered an interest in communicating with foreign people in English through her personal experiences such as studying abroad, her ideal self as a L2 learner and user changed greatly. Such change in her ideal L2 self increased her interest in English for communication and made her set new, multiple short- and long-term goals to improve the competence she now wanted to acquire. Such examples of the interrelation between internal influences and the L2 self demonstrate that ideal L2 selves can change and develop with the development of learners’ internal influences. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009: 351-52) suggest that the ideal and ‘ought-to’ selves “appear to be, by definition, fairly robust since they concern self-images that are built up over a period of time”. Results from analysis of the interview data, however, do not necessarily confirm this

claim that L2 selves are fairly stable. Rather, the ideal L2 selves examined seemed still to be subject to change while the learners' interest, perceived personal value, perceived necessity and competence, or future goals were changing over the course of their learning English. Through their personal experiences especially, in and outside school or university, learners' internal influences appeared to have changed or developed.

External influences, meanwhile, are composed of three sub-categories associated with social, pedagogical, and environmental aspect of motivation: Teachers/teaching, Family members/friends, and Learning environment inside and outside school/university. Qualitative analysis of the interview data revealed that the relationship between learners and these influences was an interactive, rather than a simple linear cause-effect one. 'Motivated' learners were not inert agents who were passively affected by these external influences. Rather, they were positively involved in these influences as active, self-reflective, and intentional agents. For example, inspired, influenced, encouraged, or supported by their teachers, 'motivated' learners in turn approached their teachers to ask questions, communicate with them in English, discuss effective learning methods, or go out together, enjoying sharing various kinds of experiences. A good relationship built by a dynamic interaction between learners and their teachers helped to promote their motivation. The interview analysis also delivered a vivid picture of parents and friends as active mediators who were positively involved in students' motivational development. This picture was quite different from the results of the analysis of the questionnaire data, from which it had appeared that parents and friends were not significant at all as independent variables as regards impact on students' motivation. This would seem to confirm that research combining both quantitative and qualitative data analysis could capture a clearer picture of the phenomenon investigated in research on L2 motivation, although studies in a quantitative paradigm in practice still dominate the field.

Characteristics of 'motivated' learners as self-motivating agents also emerged in the analysis of the interview data. They were actively involved in building good relationships with other people and environment surrounding them. They managed their learning well by planning, monitoring, and evaluating their

learning. Moreover, they were likely to have a flexible and positive view of learning English. As a result, they considered rather ‘boring’ grammar/translation-oriented lessons nevertheless to be useful to build a solid foundation to improve their English competence in the future. They employed English-language films or music to improve their skills. When they had difficulty in communicating with foreign people in English, they were encouraged to work harder rather than discouraged from learning, attributing poor performance in communicative competence in English to lack of effort rather than lack of ability. In brief, they were active, self-reflective agents with the capacity for self-management and a flexible and positive view in relation to learning English, which gave rise to high and stable motivation.

The individual interviewees had had a wide range of language-learning and language-related experiences since they were first exposed to the target language. Among these experiences, some were perceived and reported by the interviewees as ‘personally memorable and important’ and consequently are described as *Personal experiences* in my study. Qualitative analysis of the interview data revealed the vital role of these personal experiences, in which internal influences developed through the interaction of external influences such as teachers, parents, other family members, and friends within a social context. The interviewees were likely to have had personal experiences which they conceived and defined as pivotal events or moments which they would never forget and which had had a crucial impact on their subsequent learning and motivation. Such personal experiences marking turning points in the interviewees’ motivational history are thus referred to as *Key personal experiences* in my study. When the learners had these key personal experiences, internal and external influences seemed to form an organic and firm relation conducive to the internalisation of English study within the individuals, thereby establishing a foundation to keep motivation stable and high. In this sense, these key personal experiences can be seen to have played a vital role in the developmental process of motivation.

From these findings one can hypothesise that high and stable motivation of Japanese university students will occur only if affective, cognitive, and self-regulative processes are experienced simultaneously; more specifically, if students

simultaneously gain enjoyment and feelings of competence during their engagement with L2 learning, perceive their learning experiences as personally relevant or important, and take personal control of their learning effectively. The implication is that a balanced development of affective, cognitive, and self-regulative influences is essential for students to remain motivated, especially while at university, in the Japanese socio-educational environment.

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