

The Developmental Processes and Patterns of Japanese Students' Motivation for Learning English

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I make a brief report of a part of my PhD thesis (Shibuya (2010)), an exploratory study to investigate how second language (L2) motivation of Japanese university students developed from their first exposure to English to the present (university). The study seeks to explore the dynamic nature of L2 motivation from a developmental perspective, adopting a qualitatively-dominant mixed-methods approach. This is primarily because so little research has actually been conducted on the topic, especially from such a perspective (e.g. Ushioda (1996), Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), Hayashi (2005)) and utilising such an approach (e.g. Ushioda (1996), Williams and Burden (1999), Tse (2000), Syed (2001), Nakata (2003), Kubanyiova (2009)). Dörnyei (2001: 82) indeed asserts that “hardly any research has been done on analysing the dynamics of L2 motivational change and identifying typical sequential patterns and developmental aspects.” Moreover, Dörnyei (2001: 194) claims that “It may also be time for L2 motivation researchers to start considering the potentials of qualitative methods,” adding that “the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods might be a particularly fruitful direction for future motivation research.”

As studies have indicated (e.g. 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.

This paper reports especially a summary of one of the qualitative analyses of the interview data done in the study: the developmental processes and patterns of Japanese students' motivation for learning English whereby their motivation evolved from their first exposure to English up to university.

2. Research Design and Analysis

The study employed a two-phase design for the data collection: two sets of interviews (Phase 2) were subsequent to the questionnaire (Phase 1), whose strategic objective was to identify the interviewees (51 interviewees were selected from the 350 questionnaire participants).

'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.

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 English, 13 from Medicine, 11 from Engineering, and 3 from Social and Information Studies.

The questionnaire data were statistically analysed mainly with regard to ‘perceived intensity of motivation’ and ‘orientations,’ using SPSS, while the interview data was analysed qualitatively in terms of motivational influences and developmental process by using sequential analysis and coding. The analytical objective of the questionnaire data was to understand the general nature of the target group in terms of the participants’ motivational change and development. Although the questionnaire and interview data were concurrently analysed, questions which emerged from the findings in the analysis of the questionnaire data were examined as further sub-research questions in the analysis of the interview data. The analytical focus of the interview data was the participants’ subjective views of their language-learning experiences and its analytical objective was to better understand how their own understandings of their language-learning experiences affected their motivational development.

3. Summary of Main Findings

The study focused on ‘motivated’ students—116 of the 350 participants being identified, by their (self-) perceived intensity of willingness to study English, as ‘motivated’ at university. 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.

Factor analysis (principal component analysis with varimax rotation) of statements referring to reasons for learning English, or 'orientations,' revealed that the participants' orientations could be defined by five factors: intrinsic, utilitarian, international, extrinsic/instrumental, and parents/friends. One of the most important findings was that 'motivated' students learned English for multiple reasons: intrinsic, utilitarian, international, and extrinsic/instrumental, while 'less motivated' learners did so only for one reason: extrinsic/instrumental. From this result, students were assumed to need to develop multiple reasons for learning English to keep themselves motivated while at university.

Analysis of the interview data identified two main motivational influences which seemed to have been effective in enhancing, sustaining, and developing the students' motivation: *Internal influences* related to affect, cognition, and self-regulation, such as Enjoyment/pleasure, Interest in English-language culture, Interest in English for communication, Perceived competence, Perceived necessity/usefulness, Perceived personal value, Goals, and Self-management; and *External influences* involving social, pedagogical, and contextual aspects related to the L2 learners' learning environment, such as Teachers/teaching, Family members/friends, and Learning environment inside/outside school.

One of the most important findings with regard to these motivational influences was that 'motivated' learners' motivation for learning English was shaped by 'collaborative' processes of affective, cognitive, and self-regulative internal influences rather than by the independent operation of each of these influences, although each possesses its own function and attribute as a motivational factor. This result seemed to mirror the results of quantitative analysis of 'orientations,' in that L2 motivation appeared to be shaped by a combination of multiple affective and cognitive factors, especially at university.

4. Patterns (or Types) of the Motivational Development

Analysis of the interview data revealed that while the development of the L2 motivation of the learners varied from one to the next, commonalities could be identified between them. Qualitative analysis suggests that, based on types of language-learning/language-related experiences or patterns of the development of L2 motivation, three groups of 'motivated' interviewees—the 'High-High,' 'Low-High' and 'High-Low-High' groups—could be broadly subdivided into smaller groups. The distinguishing features of these sub-groups may be summarised as follows:

- (1) **'Communication (and/or) culture-based' vs. 'Schoolwork-based'**: some students' motivation for learning English developed primarily in relation to communication-/culture-centred language-learning/language-related experiences, such as interaction with native speakers of English or foreign people, or enjoying English-language films, TV dramas, or music; while others developed mainly in relation to schoolwork-related language learning experiences such as English lessons, assignments, tests, or preparing for entrance examinations.
- (2) **'Self-guided' vs. 'Teacher-guided'**: some students recovered or improved their decreased motivation on their own, while others did so as a result of teachers' support.
- (3) **'Affect-driven' vs. 'Cognition-driven'**: some students' motivation for studying English was initiated or triggered primarily by affect-related experiences such as gaining enjoyment, pleasure, or feelings of competence; while others' motivation was awakened mainly by conscious, introspective, or reflective cognitive experiences such as perceiving personal relevance and value in studying English.

In reality, some students may be hard to classify into one or more of these dichotomous categories or both sides of a category may apply to them. For example, the learners of sub-group 3 in the 'High-High' group developed their

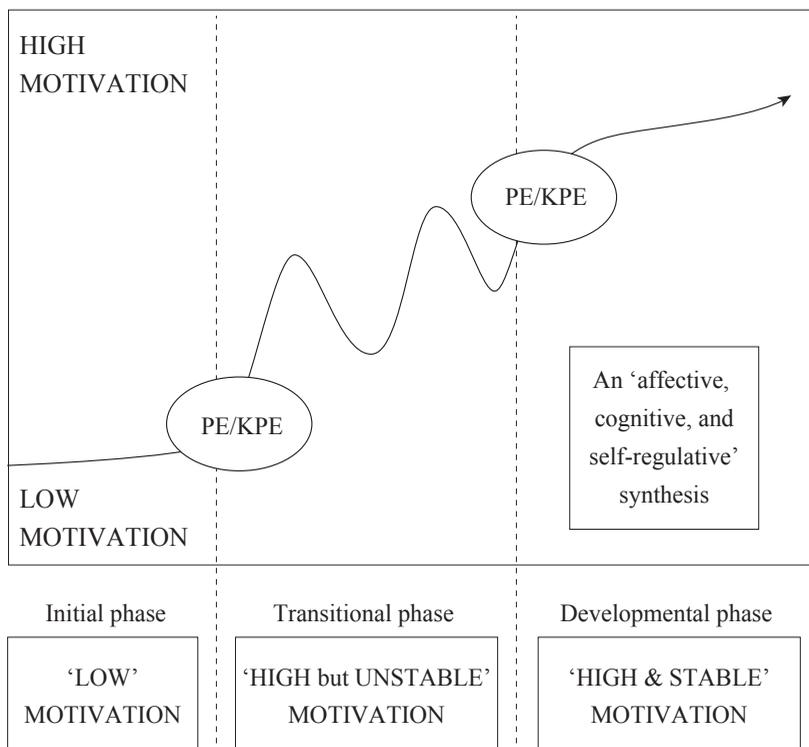
motivation for learning English not only from communication-/culture-based language-learning and language-related experiences but also from schoolwork-based language-learning experiences. So these classifications represent merely one possible interpretation. Moreover, there may be ‘intra-individual’ differences over the course of students’ language-learning careers. For example, some students developed their motivation chiefly on the basis of schoolwork-based language-learning experiences at the early stage of learning, but in relation to communication-/culture-centred language-learning experiences at the later stage. Or students might typically tend to be ‘teacher-guided’ rather than ‘self-guided’ in their motivational recovery at the early stage of learning; or be more likely to be ‘affect-driven’ in childhood, and ‘cognition-driven’ when they are more mature or grown-up. In the end, what the analysis revealed above all was the complex and dynamically changing nature of the phenomenon of L2 motivation. The individuals and the contexts in which they learned constantly and rapidly changed and evolved in many respects whilst the learning was taking place. The categories outlined above thus merely account for certain of the multifaceted aspects of the learners and their motivation that had temporary application in the course of a learning period of long duration.

5. The Process of the Motivational Development

In spite of the differences as regards motivational change between the ‘High-High,’ ‘Low-High,’ and ‘High-Low-High’ groups, analysis of the interview data indicates that the learners in these three groups seemed to have followed a similar developmental process of motivation, involving three phases of the motivation process along a continuum. Figure 1 presents the process diagrammatically.

The three-phase graphic model presented in Figure 1 includes: (1) **initial phase**: students are not motivated yet; (2) **transitional phase**: students are likely to have personal or key personal experiences from which they derive positive feelings of enjoyment, pleasure, competence etc. from learning/using English, which develops intrinsic motivation and a positive self-concept as a L2 learner. As a result, their motivation is initiated, enhanced, and lasts during

Figure 1: Graphic Representation of Development Process of 'Motivated' Learners' Motivation for Learning English over the Course of Their Language-Learning Careers.



PE: Personal experiences / KPE: Key personal experiences

a certain learning phase. The state of motivation is not necessarily stable yet, however. Consequently motivation is still vulnerable to negative influences and experiences such as boring lessons, poor rapport with teachers, or bad academic results; (3) **developmental phase**: students are likely to have personal or key personal experiences in which they not only find learning English enjoyable, fun, and interesting, but also feel studying English to be 'personally' important or necessary, which allows them to perceive personal relevance in their learning and to make a 'meaningful' connection between the self and what they are in-

volved in. In addition, the students are likely to manage their learning effectively as self-reflective intentional agents during this stage. Such affective, cognitive, and self-regulative processes, experienced simultaneously, will give rise to an internalisation of the target language such that English becomes part of learners' individual identities and learning it becomes naturally integrated into their daily lives, shaping a 'high' and 'stable' motivation.

The learners of the 'High-High' group seemed to proceed to the developmental phase relatively smoothly at the early stage of learning English, most likely during their junior high school period. The learners of the 'High-Low-High' group, on the other hand, seemed to proceed to the transitional phase, but not to the developmental phase while at junior high school. As a result, their motivation seems to have declined in the face of negative experiences at high school. The 'Low-High' group meanwhile seemed to have followed the process smoothly, but gradually, from the initial phase (at junior high school) to the transitional and developmental phase (at high school and university).

6. Discussions

As for the transitional stage, the students' motivation was typically initiated by the support of people surrounding them, such as mothers and teachers, who served as mediators to trigger and promote their interest and motivation. Their motivation tended to be triggered and enhanced by their positive emotional experiences such as enjoyment, pleasure, fun, and feelings of competence, progress, or success through interactions with these mediators. While such affect-related experiences seem to have played a vital role in initiating the motivation of most of the 'motivated' learners, for some of them, more specifically half of the members of the 'High-Low-High' group, it was awakened by their self-reflective, introspective, conscious cognitive experiences at a later stage of their learning, most often at university. This suggests that cognition-related processes also serve as a trigger for students' motivation, especially when they are more mature. It should be noted, however, that these 'cognition-driven' students used to be among those whose motivation was driven by 'affect-related' experiences, at the early

stage of their learning. Moreover, it might be more plausible to suggest that both cognitive and affective experiences tend to be simultaneously involved in initiating motivation in one way or another, rather than that one type of experience is clearly predominantly responsible for stimulating motivation at any given stage of learning.

With regard to the developmental phase, the students' motivation is represented as quintessentially stabilised by the development of internal influences related to cognition, affect, and self-regulation. What is important is that a 'cognitive, affective, and self-regulative' *synthesis* seems to be essential for sustaining their motivation, especially at university where students experience greater freedom and independence, without entrance examination pressures.

The developmental process illustrated in Figure 1 may well merely represent the prototypical motivational development of 'motivated' learners in a somewhat oversimplified, albeit explicit and comprehensible, manner. In reality, the process may be distinctly more complex. It might for example be difficult in fact to draw a clear line between one phase and another, since motivational development can be involved in both phases simultaneously. It might also happen that even in the case of students who proceed to the developmental phase, in which their motivation is relatively high and stable, motivation might nevertheless wane, not because they lose interest in learning the language or face negative experiences, but because they encounter something more interesting or more important in which they would like to invest their energy and time. Moreover, some students who proceed to the transitional phase might recede to the initial phase rather than proceed to the developmental phase. Others might follow the process repeatedly over time—proceeding to a subsequent phase and then receding to a previous one repeatedly, without necessarily stabilising at all. While motivational development may typically progress in serial fashion, therefore, it might also follow a cyclical or retrogressive path. It would thus be prudent to consider the development of L2 motivation as potentially a complex, dynamic process, rather than as simply linear.

7. Conclusion

My study revealed that L2 motivation of the Japanese students being studied developed over time with regard to cognitive, affective, and self-regulative processes. Especially, a balanced development of affective, cognitive, and self-regulative internal influences seemed to be essential to sustain the students' motivation while at university. Findings, however, are still limited and further research is needed to capture a clear picture of the development of L2 motivation. The temporal dimension of research into motivational development could be explored by the application of two further research methodologies: first, cross-sectional studies of different groups of students of English from different age ranges would provide a useful comparison of trends which would throw some light on snap-shot differences related to different time and learning contexts; and finally, a longitudinal study tracking the same students over a number of years of studying English in Japan would give us invaluable insights into the development of motivation over time.

In order better to understand so multifaceted and complex a phenomenon as the nature of L2 motivation, we may well need various kinds of data on the same topic in order to validate the data set as a whole: the quite different pictures of the same phenomenon provided by qualitative and quantitative data in my study indeed suggest that the data from a single method would be insufficient to account for it. In future research on L2 motivation in particular, where quantitative research still dominates the field, more emphasis should perhaps be placed upon qualitative, or mixed-method, approaches to gain a clearer picture of the phenomenon.

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