

**Motivation in Second language learning:
Ethnolinguistic vitality or Psychological construct that counts?**

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Abstract

The present paper tries to identify the societal factors and psychological factors that motivate students to have better performance in English as a second language and to postulate a theoretical model subsuming these socio-psychological variables to explain and predict the performance in English as a second language for Hong Kong students in Australia. Since the proposal of Socio-educational model of second language learning by Gardner in 1959, there are number of studies focused on identifying the potent factors in second language acquisition Giles and Byrne (1982) emphasized the need to have variables intended to determine the perceived relationships operating between ethnic groups. Kraemer (1993) included ethnolinguistic vitality perception construct in her study on social psychological factors in the learning of Arabic in Israeli schools. 247 students of ethnic Chinese in Sydney metropolitan area who were studying in weekend Chinese schools and 628 Hong Kong students who were studying in primary and secondary schools were sampled. Path analysis was used to determine the relationship between the performance of Chinese and English with societal and psychological variables. The study focuses on the relative contribution of societal variables and psychological variables to the language performance of students.

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Introduction

Students in Hong Kong usually received their primary education in Chinese (written text is in Chinese characters, and the teaching is delivered in Cantonese, a dialect of Chinese). Before July 1, 1997, majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong adopted English as the medium of instruction. However, this did not imply that students are necessarily proficient in English after secondary school. The use of English is strictly confined to classroom settings.

In Australia, English is the first and usually the only language of about 83% of the population (1983 Language Survey). The lack of proficiency in English correlates with lower paid employment and occupational mobility. Very often new immigrants with limited English proficiency are in a less advantageous position to get access to government assistance and job opportunities. The Australian government has done a lot to ease the hurdle by providing services in multi-languages and voluntary and government agents to help the new immigrants. The multicultural policies adopted by both Labor and Liberal governments after 1975 paved the way for the ethnic minority to retain their cultural identity while at the same time being encouraged to share the overarching values of Australians. English remains the common language for work and education and every aspect of life.

Social psychological variables and second language acquisition

Many major language researchers have chosen a social psychological orientation toward language learning motivation. A leading social psychological theorist, Robert Gardner, introduced the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation in relation to second language acquisition. In his conceptualisation, students will have higher performance in the second language performance if they exhibit the desire to learn the second language in order to integrate themselves with the target culture than when they exhibit the desire to learn the language in order to get a better job or meet a particular requirement. Gardner's socio-educational model (Gardner, 1979) includes attitudinal variables such as attitudes toward the target language group, language teachers, language course and the learning of the language; motivational variables such as the desire to learn the language and motivational intensity; and anxiety variables such as anxiety pertinent to the language class and language use.

Another line of second language research is on the study of societal influence on the language acquisition. In studying the social influence on second-language acquisition, Clément (1980) extended Giles, Bourhis and Taylor's (1977) concept of ethnolinguistic vitality to relate the individual's acquisition of practice and maintenance of communicative competence in second language to the social/structural characteristics of the corresponding community. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor's (1977) defined Ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) as structural characteristics of status factors, demographic representation and institutional support related to a language. The status factors are variables related to the economic wealth, social status, sociohistorical status and the status of language used by the linguistic groups. The demographic variables relate to the absolute number of members comprising the ethnolinguistic group and their distribution throughout a particular urban, regional or national territory, birth rate, mixed marriage, immigration / emigration patterns of the group.

Institutional support variables refer to the extent to which a language group enjoys formal or informal representation in the various institutions of a community that are important to its survival. In a multi-ethnic setting such as found in Australia, it would be expected that it is the languages of groups showing the strongest ethnolinguistic vitality that are likely to predominate. Clément (1980) conceptualised ethnolinguistic vitality as initiating an individual motivational process which mediates the influence of milieu on communicative competence. The perceived status of language affects their use of and attitude toward a language. Giles *et al.* (1982) emphasized the need to have variables intended to determine the perceived relationships operating between ethnic groups. Kraemer included the ethnolinguistic vitality perception construct in her study on social psychological factors in the learning of Arabic in Israeli schools (Kraemer, 1993). Kraemer (1993) included three other variables: the students' language background, the student's perception of whether his/her parents support the learning of Arabic, and the status of Arabic in school.

Subjective Vitality Questionnaires (SVQ)

Bourhis, Giles & Rosenthal (1981) developed the Subjective Vitality Questionnaires (SVQ) as a means of measuring group members' assessment of their own and their outgroup vitality. Bourhis *et al.* (1981) argued that a group's subjective assessment of its vitality of SVQ consists of a total of twenty-two questions, nineteen questions were formulated in term of nineteen variables identified in Giles *et al.* (1977) measured the three main factors contributed to a group's overall vitality. Five questions assess the status of the group, six questions assess the demographic strength of the group, and eight questions assess their institutional support. Two more questions ask the subjects to evaluate the overall strength or degree of activity of each of the ethnolinguistic group at the present time and in the future time (20 or 30 years from now). A final question asks the subjects to give their perception of the degree of contact between the two linguistic groups. A taxonomy of the structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality was show in Figure 1.

Subjective vitality as a belief system

Allard & Landry (1986) suggested that subjective ethnolinguistic vitality should be better conceptualised as having a much broader structure than the three dimensions proposed by Giles *et al.* (1977) and Bourhis *et al.* (1981). Kreitler & Kreitler's (1972, 1976, 1982) identified four types of beliefs that have significant contribution to better prediction of behaviour: (1) General beliefs about the factual relationship between a subject and an object of reference, (2) Normative beliefs concerning to what should exist as regards the vitality situation, (3) Personal beliefs about respondents' present behaviour or situation, (4) Goal beliefs about respondent's own desire to behave in certain ways regarding key aspects of vitality. Allard and Landry (1986) saw that the perceptions measured in Bourhis *et al.*'s (1981) questionnaires as an reflection of Kreitler and Kreitler's (1976) general beliefs, and accordingly SVQ taped only one of the four types of beliefs needed for a more successful prediction of behaviour.

Beliefs on Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire (BEVQ)

Allard and Landry (1986) developed a 24-item version of the *Beliefs on Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire* (BEVQ) consisting of four subscales incorporating six of Giles *et al.*'s

(1977) structure variables. In their study, they asked two small groups (n=15, 13) of francophone parents in Moncton, New Brunswick completed the BEVQ: one group made up of parents whose children were attending the province's French schools; the other group made up of parents who had sent their children to English schools. Results showed that francophone parents who sent their children to French schools scored higher in normative beliefs, personal beliefs and goal beliefs on the BEVQ for francophone vitality than those parents who had sent their children to English schools. There was no significant difference in general beliefs scales indicating that members of an ethnic community can have similar perceptions of factual information concerning their group's vitality. Allard and Landry (1986) concluded that while general beliefs scales, as measured using SVQ of Bourhis *et al.* (1981), are capable to discriminate between different ethnic groups in the same social environment, they fail to differentiate intra-ethnic group in a specific context (e.g. sent children to first language schools or second language schools). The SVQ and BEVQ have been empirically compared by Bourhis and Bédard (1988) and Allard and Landry (1994). Bourhis and Bedard concluded that BEVQ was a better predictor of language use and language evaluation than the SVQ, SVQ is adequate for examining between differences. The BEVQ measures a wide spectrum of cognitive-affective representations of vitality and was shown to detect intra-ethnic group differences while the SVQ could not (Allard & Landry, 1986). The BEVQ was considered be able to provide an important basis for the study of language maintenance and loss as well as other aspects of intra- and inter-group functioning.

Figure 1: A taxonomy of the structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality

Vitality

Status Institutional

Factors Support and

(5 items) Demographic Control

Factors Factors

(6 items) (8 items)

Economic status

Social status

Sociohistorical status

Language status intragroup

intergroup

Regional concentration

Proportion Mass media

Birth rate Education

Mixed marriage Govt. services

Immigration Industry (2 items)

Emigration Religion

Culture

Politics

Based on Bourhis, R., Giles, H., & Rosenthal, D., (1981). Notes on the Construction of a 'Subjective Vitality Questionnaire' for Ethnolinguistic Groups. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 2(2), 149.

Psychological variables and second language acquisition

Noels (2001) remarked that motivation to language learning is a complex set of variables including effort, desire to achieve goals, as well as attitudes toward the learning of the language. Individuals' motivation to second-language learning also includes their motivation orientations, interest in the second language, attitudes toward the second-language group, attitudes toward the second-language learning situations and second-language anxiety. As quoted by Gardner in his discussion on the nature of second-language acquisition, Lambert was the first researcher to propose a social psychological theory of second-language acquisition in 1963 (Gardner, 1979). The Lambert's theory argued that an individual who successfully acquires a second language would gradually adopt various aspects of behaviours characteristic of the second-language community, and his motivation is to be determined by his attitudes and his orientations toward the learning the second language (Gardner, 1979).

The Gardner's (1979) socio-educational model of second-language acquisition focuses on four individual variables: Intelligence, Language aptitude, Motivation, and Situation anxiety. Gilksman, Gardner and Smythe (1982) demonstrated that integrative motive plays major function in effecting achievement in a second language by orienting students to work on

every opportunity possible to improve language proficiency, sustaining the motivation and enthusiasm in classroom. Gardner, Lalonde and Pierson (1983) in their testing the adequacy of Gardner's (1979) socio-educational model, Integrativeness and Attitudes toward the language learning situation were used as attitudinal constructs to determine learners' Motivation. Both Motivation and Language anxiety were included to effect second-language achievement. Results indicated that Integrativeness and Attitudes toward the language learning situation are causally linked to Motivation and in turn causes second-language achievement. The findings also showed that Language anxiety has negative path with Motivation and indirectly causes second-language achievement. Integrativeness was represented by three measures: Interest in foreign languages, Attitudes toward French Canadians, and rating of integrativeness, whereas Attitudes toward the language learning situation was represented by two measures: French teacher evaluation and French course evaluation. The rating of integrativeness was later renamed as Integrative orientation (Lalonde & Gardner, 1985). Motivation was measured by Attitudes toward learning French, Motivational intensity and Desire to learn French, and Language anxiety was measured by French class anxiety and French use anxiety. In a later research, Lalonde and Gardner showed that Motivation, Integrativeness and Attitudes toward the language learning situation have high predictive power of three outcomes: Behavioural intention to pursue French study, Final course grades in French, and French achievements for different course years (Lalonde & Gardner, 1985).

Methodology

16 items were drawn from the study of the motivation of learning English as a second language for Hong Kong students in Sydney by the author. The construction was based on the four different kinds of beliefs (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1982) and four capitals (Allard & Landry, 1994). Two items were written for each of the four beliefs, namely, General beliefs, Norm beliefs, Personal beliefs, and Goal beliefs. The four capitals were Demographic capital, Economic capital, Political capital, and Cultural capital. A total of 32 items were written. After pilot study to 71 students in Sydney and 199 students in Hong Kong, sixteen items were removed due to low factor loadings and item-total correlation in factor analysis procedure. The 16 items were included in a questionnaire to measure ethnolinguistic vitality together with 95 other items measuring psychological variables based on Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition. Students were also asked to complete two language tests at the same time to assess their proficiency in English and Chinese. The psychological variables discussed in the paper are Attitude toward English speaking people, Interest in foreign language, integrative orientation, Instrumental orientation, Evaluation of English teachers, Evaluation of English courses, Attitude toward the learning of English, Motivational intensity, Desire to learn English, English class anxiety, English use anxiety, Self-efficacy in English learning.

Results

The reliability coefficients of twelve psychological variables and two ethnolinguistic vitality variables were presented in Table 1 with alphas ranged from .627 to .904. If the English total marks were allowed to correlated with factor scores of the fourteen variables in Gardner's socio-educational model, only four variables were found significantly correlated with English total score (Table 2): Evaluation of English course ($r=.444$, $p<.01$), Attitude toward the learning of English ($r=.489$, $p<.001$), Desire to learn English ($r=.539$, $p<.001$), Self-efficacy in English learning ($r=.452$, $p<.001$).

Table 1
 Reliability coefficients of 12 psychological variables and
 2 ethnolinguistic vitality variables

Variable	Alpha
Attitudes toward English speaking people	.705
Intesest in foreign language	.764
Integrative orientation	.891
Intrumental orientation	.653
Evaluation of English teachers	.763
Evaluation of English courses	.627
Attitudes toward the learning of English	.904
Motivational intensity	.865
Desire to learn English	.820
English class anxiety	.798
English use anxiety	.752
Self-efficacy in English learning	.814
EV exocentric beliefs	.856
EV egocentric beliefs	.773

Table 2
 Correlation of English total mark with factor scores of 12 psychological
 variables and 2 ethnolinguistic vitality variables

Variable	English total mark	
	Correlation coeff.	Sig.
Attitudes toward English speaking people	.082	n.s.

Interest in foreign language	.342	n.s.
Integrative orientation	.227	n.s.
Instrumental orientation	.263	n.s.
Evaluation of English teachers	.334	n.s.
Evaluation of English courses	.444	P<.01
Attitudes toward the learning of English	.489	P<.001
Motivational intensity	.343	n.s.
Desire to learn English	.539	P<.001
English class anxiety	-.024	n.s.
English use anxiety	-.288	n.s.
Self-efficacy in English learning	.452	P<.001
EV exocentric beliefs	-.305	n.s.
EV egocentric beliefs	.114	n.s.

Discussion

There is non-significant correlation between the English total score with ethnolinguistic vitality factor, whereas strong correlations were found in four psychological variables: students' evaluation of English courses, their attitude toward the learning of English, students' desire to learn English and their self-evaluation of their English learning.

The study is part of a major study relating ethnolinguistic vitality, motivation, integrativeness, language anxiety and the performance of English language in the learning of English as a second language for Chinese students in Sydney. The relationships between different variables were determined using path analysis and based on which to propose a causal modelling for the second language acquisition of Hong Kong students. (The path model for the study was not presented here.) Motivation was found to be positively related to language achievement, integrativeness and ethnolinguistic vitality were found indirectly positively related to language achievement. Integrativeness, attitudes toward language learning situation, self-efficacy and goal setting were found positively related to Motivation, while language anxiety negatively related to motivation. The study also showed that proficiency in Chinese and English both had an effect on the English achievement.

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