Lack of Studies on Expectancy and Motivation for Low-Achieving L2 Students in Japanese School Contexts

Mika TATSUMOTO

Many researchers have proposed the importance of events, not relying on generalization, in a specific environment in leading motivational theories, such as attribution theory (e.g., Kraemer, 1995) and self-efficacy models. However, concerning the relationships between expectancy and motivation in the foreign/second language learning (L2) field, studies seem to be still limited, in particular, for low-achieving students in Japanese school contexts. Therefore, this paper discusses related studies about these relationships in the Japanese L2 environment.

Concern was expressed in the early 1990s over the somewhat narrow perspectives on motivation. Several researchers in the L2 field (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994a, 1994b; Oxford & Shearin, 1994) pointed out that mainstream psychological and educational psychological theories of motivation are not reflected in L2 motivation theories and research. These researchers, at the same time, identified expectancy as one important motivational component in L2 learning. Since then, there has been a growing number of empirical studies involving such theories or expectancy, although their number is still limited in comparison to those in the psychological literature.

One empirical study which responded to this gap in the research was conducted by Tremblay and Gardner (1995). Their research is based on Gardner’s (1985) Socio-Educational Model, which is a well-known motivation theory in L2 learning. They extended the model by introducing ‘new motivational variables’ which are derived from some dominant motivation theories in the psychological literature, such as the expectancy-value model, attribution theory and goal setting theory. Roughly speaking, what they mainly tried to find out was whether the motivational variables (goal salience, goal specificity and goal frequency). The former was designed to measure “the extent to which students have specific goals in their French course” and the latter was designed to measure “the frequency of goal strategy use (e.g., making plans or schedules) to study French (ibid: 509, 512).

---
1 Goal setting theory assumes that individuals who have accepted specific and challenging goals outperform individuals with non-specific and easy goals (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995).
2 Goal salience is a variable derived from goal setting theory, and it was assessed by two scales labelled goal specificity and goal frequency. The former was designed to measure “the extent to which students have specific goals in their French course” and the latter was designed to measure “the frequency of goal strategy use (e.g., making plans or schedules) to study French (ibid: 509, 512).
valence\(^3\) and self-efficacy together with adaptive attributions\(^4\) play a role as mediators between attitudes towards the target language (language attitudes)\(^5\) and motivation, consequently leading to achievement. They found all hypothesised relations to be positively and significantly linked. Among these findings, the following are relevant to present discussion: (a) Self-efficacy (expectancy), which was influenced by attitudes towards the target language and adaptive attributions,\(^6\) directly affected students’ motivational behaviour first, and then the motivational behaviour had direct effects on their achievement; (b) Goal salience and valence, which were influenced by attitudes towards the target language, directly affected motivational behaviour.

In brief, in Tremblay and Gardner’s study, self-efficacy (expectancy) was found to act, alongside other variables (goal salience and valence), to increase students’ motivation which led to achievement. Thus, these findings suggest that expectancy is one important motivational component in L2 learning.

Because Tremblay and Gardner’s study was the first to look at self-efficacy and motivation in the L2 learning context, it is important for researchers in this area. I feel it would therefore be useful to provide a more detailed account of the study, and look at the background of the participants and data collection procedures. Tremblay and Gardner conducted their study in Canada where they looked at francophone secondary school students (grades 11, 12 and 13) studying in French language courses. All participants used English and French in their everyday life (the language environment outside the school was mainly English); 24% of them reported that English was their first language while 76% reported that French was their first language. Self-reported questionnaires, which were mainly rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement (−3) to strong agreement (+3), were the main instrument for the investigation. The overall grade in the course was used as an indicator of achievement and this was based on tests of grammar and textual comprehension, essay

---

3 Valence is generally defined as “the subjective value that an individual associates with a particular outcome”, and it was assessed by two scales labelled desire to learn French and attitudes toward learning French (ibid: 508).

4 Adaptive attributions refer to attributions which are associated with high self-efficacy, including attributions of success to ability, attributions of success to effort and of failure to lack of effort; conversely, mal-adaptive attributions involve attributions of failure to lack of ability, and attributions to the context or to luck in cases of success and failure (ibid.). This variable was measured by questionnaires asking students whether they would attribute their success to ability, effort, context, or luck, and their failure to lack of ability, lack of effort, context, or bad luck (ibid.).

5 Language attitudes consist of two classes of variable: integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situations. The former refers to “an open and positive regard for other groups and for groups that speak the language”, and it is composed of three categories: attitudes toward the target language group, interest in foreign languages and integrative orientation (ibid: 506). The latter comprises two categories of attitudes: attitudes toward the language course and attitudes toward the language teacher (ibid.).

6 Among factors consisting of adaptive attributions, attributions of success to ability were significantly related to the variable, but not those of success to effort or of failure to lack of effort.
writing, and oral presentations. In addition, a one-page essay test was also administered to evaluate achievement, using five items assessing grammar, quality of vocabulary, complexity of sentence structure, content development and content originality. In this investigation, self-efficacy, regarded as the most important expectancy, consisted of three factors: performance expectancy, anxiety over the use of French (FUA) and anxiety in the French class (FCA). Performance expectancy was defined as “students’ perceptions of their anticipated proficiency in French at the end of the course” (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995: 507) and was rated by items such as “Understand the meaning of most French proverbs” (ibid: 512). A scale for performance expectancy was created for this study. An Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was used to examine anxiety. Examples of the items were “I would feel uncomfortable speaking French under any circumstances” for FUA and “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our French class” for FCA (ibid: 511). Motivational behaviour was also evaluated by three components: effort, persistence and attention. Effort was measured by the Motivational Intensity scale of the AMTB, and an example of the items was, “I really work hard to learn French” (ibid: 511). Attention and persistence were measured by the scales developed by Tremblay and Gardner, and examples were “Nothing distracts me when I am studying French” for attention and “I work on my French homework very regularly” for persistence (ibid: 511).

Although the results of this study are significant and interesting, due to the fact that the research is empirical and concerns L2 learning, we still need an investigation which has at least a few more similarities to the Japanese environment. For one thing, the context of the above study was very different from that in Japan; the participants had an advantageous and somewhat favourable environment for language learning because they used both languages in everyday situations. In addition, the first language of the majority was French. In Japan, English is not normally used in students’ everyday lives, even in English classrooms. Furthermore, the vast majority use only the Japanese language, due to the ratio of the population whose first language is Japanese. According to official figures in October 2006, 98.7% of the population is Japanese. This means that there are only limited chances of direct communication with native speakers of the target language, and this situation in turn is likely to influence students’ expectancy and motivation. With respect to the language environment relating to Canadian contexts, Dörnyei (1990: 48) writes:

---

7 They define self-efficacy as “an individual’s beliefs that he or she has the capability to reach a certain level of performance or achievement” (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995: 507).
8 Anxiety is considered to be negatively related to expectancy; accordingly, a low score of anxiety (FUA and FCA) in the scale indicates, alongside a high score of performance expectancy in its measure, a high level of self-efficacy.
9 From the Statistics Bureau, Director-General for Policy Planning (Statistical Standards) & Statistical Research and Training Institute [Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications].
This [Canadian] environment is an example of what can generally be termed a second-language acquisition (SLA) context, where the target language is mastered either through direct exposure to it or through formal instruction accompanied by frequent interaction with the target-language community in the host environment or in a multicultural setting ... Although SLA contexts are varied, they are clearly distinct from another type of language-learning milieu, generally termed a foreign-language learning (FLL) context, which involves a community in which one or two languages are taught in school for several years as an academic subject and many students develop proficiency in them.

One empirical study conducted in Hungary by Clément et al. (1994) is much closer to the Japanese case in terms of similarity of context: 97.8% of the population were Hungarians and less than 9% of the population could speak any foreign language. This means that in both countries students usually see English as an ordinary school subject. In other words, they normally use and/or study English only in school. Some characteristics of the language environment which they describe also exist in Japan (ibid: 419):

...contact with English language and culture through the media and through the use of high-technology devices such as computers was significant and ...English was widely recognized as the lingua franca of international communication.

The following is an outline description of the study conducted by Clément et al. (1994). The participants were secondary school pupils (aged 17–18) who studied English as one of their official school subjects. Self-confidence was measured by self-reported questionnaires which used a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly. The related items are shown in three categories: English Use Anxiety (EUA), English Class Anxiety (ECA) and Self-evaluation of English Language Ability (ELA). Although samples of the items are not presented in the article, summaries of each category are provided (ibid: 426, 428); EUA is anxiety “experienced while using the second language outside the classroom”, ECA is “the extent to which the student felt anxious during English class” and ELA is “how well they [students] could use English, in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension.”

The findings of their study are very interesting. They indicate that students’ self-confidence influences L2 proficiency (achievement) through students’ attitude towards and effort expended on learning English (motivation). This suggests that expectancy has an impact on motivation because self-confidence is analogous in some ways to expectancy, although there are differences between self-efficacy (expectancy) and self-confidence, as Tremblay and Gardner (1995: 507) point out:
Self-confidence differs from self-efficacy mainly in terms of the inclusion of an anxiety component... Self-confidence in the language learning context is usually assessed with measures of perceived proficiency at the time of testing, whereas self-efficacy is more closely tied to the level of performance that an individual believes he or she could achieve at some point in the future.

In short, there are two differences between self-confidence and self-efficacy: whether anxiety is included and whether ‘perceived level of performance’ concerns performance now or in the future.

However, these differences seem to emphasise, at the same time, crucial similarities which focus both on individuals’ beliefs and their performance level. Regarding anxiety, although the inclusion of anxiety appears to be important, the beliefs might be important at least to some extent even if anxiety was excluded from the measures of research. This may be comprehended by looking more closely at the definition of anxiety. Clément et al. (1994) define it in their study in terms of low anxiety affect and high self-perceptions of L2 competence, which means that the perceived level of competence should be high when the level of anxiety is low. This suggests that we can predict that the level of the anxiety should be low when the beliefs are high, even if anxiety is not directly measured. From this, we may easily understand the importance of students’ beliefs about their competence or level of performance, as well as that of anxiety.

Not only the research above, but other studies in the FLL context also confirm the effect of expectancy on motivation (e.g., Wu, 2003; Sun, 1995). These studies have been conducted in such varied countries as Lebanon, Taiwan and the United States. The fact that they all found the relationship between the two factors is significant, considering the many contextual differences between the nations.

As stated above, throughout this paper, expectancy is considered to be an important element which influences motivation, according to the motivational theories which dominate the psychological literature; related studies, including those in the L2 field, also support this view.

Up to now only limited numbers of comprehensive investigations of L2 motivation have been conducted in the Japanese school context, and those focusing on low-achieving EFL students which use qualitative research methods are rare. Considering the influence of the social and cultural context and the lack of qualitative research (see e.g., Peck, 1998; Chen et al., 2005; Allen, 2006), there is need for such investigations. Regarding the contextual influence and dominance of quantitative approaches in L2 motivation research, Dörnyei (2001: 65, 192) comments:

...human motivation is to a large extent socially shaped and this contextual dependence is

10 See e.g., Vispoel and Austin (1995); Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons (1992); Tatsumoto (2011).
particularly prominent when the target behaviour is the learning of a L2, due to the multifaceted nature and role of language itself.

...most of the motivational data in the L2 field in the past have been gathered by means of questionnaires typically employing quantifiable rating scales without any open-ended items...

Acknowledgement

Part of this article is drawn from my doctoral dissertation (Tatsumoto, 2011), and the preparation of this article was partly aided by a research grant from Nagoya Gakuin University.

References


Lack of Studies on Expectancy and Motivation for Low-Achieving L2 Students in Japanese School Contexts


