

Language Teachers' Motivation to Learn English

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Introduction

Motivation is said to be one of the key elements of successful language learning (Dörnyei, 2001, Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001, Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). According to Gardner and Lambert (1972) there are two types of motivation in language learning: integrative and instrumental motivations. They defined integrative motivation as a “desire to be integrated in one linguistic group (p.13).” Perkins (2008) pointed out its influence on language learning in the Japanese context.

The actual picture of this integrative motivation working in language learning is still in need of illustration. In this study, six Japanese English teachers' learning experiences are analyzed to show how integrative motivation worked when they learned English.

Methodology

The data of this study were collected between 1999 and 2001. They were originally collected for another research (Mashiyama, 2004). The six participants were interviewed. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were thematically analyzed. In this study the parts related to integrative motivation were extracted from the transcriptions and reanalyzed.

All of the participants experienced teaching at schools in Japan. Three of

them were working at schools at the time of the interviews. Two others were studying in the United States, and the last one was teaching at a private conversation school. As they chose teaching English as their occupation, we might be able to say that they were successful in learning English. All of the participants were native Japanese.

Findings

According to the participants' interviews, there are two groups: (A) group with indications of integrative motivation in their experiences, and (B) group with not much indication of integrative motivation.

Group A - Admirers of English cultures

Four participants showed their positive interests in English cultures. They mentioned their love of English songs, especially pop music, and other cultural aspects of English. Two of them were music lovers and the other two were foreign culture lovers.

Ms. Takayama (pseudo name) was a passionate teacher. She had taught English at junior and senior high schools for 8 years in Japan. When she became interested in English in her first year in the junior high school, it was a radio that introduced her to English. "I tuned the radio to catch middle range wave, and short wave and long wave, only for listening to music, whenever I had time, every day. And it became my hobby (Interview #1, p.7)." Then she found her dream job through a program called "American Top 40." It was a program which introduced Top 40 songs on American music chart. The main personality is a native English speaker and he used English when he introduced songs. She listened to this program repeatedly until she remembered the phrases used in the program in English. She was strongly attracted to one of the personalities of the program, Reiko Yukawa. Ms. Takayama said, "And then I got to know Reiko Yukawa and I wanted to be her apprentice. I really wished that I would be her

follower (Interview #1, pp.8-9).” She started to dream of being a music promoter like Ms. Yukawa.

This dream drove Ms. Takayama to study English. She thought English was a part of her dream job. She bought music magazines and records, and wrote reviews of the records to music magazines. She went to concerts and wrote reviews to the radio programs. She memorized English textbooks and practiced translating Japanese sentences into English. To fulfill her dream, she decided to join an English department in college. But, of course, there were times when it was difficult for her to maintain her motivation to learn English. She stated: “I sometimes liked English and sometimes didn’t. I wanted to work as a music promoter, but there were ups and downs in terms of studying [in school] (Interview #1, p.10).” Even when she did not enjoy learning English at school, she continued to be motivated. She said, “I had a motivation to learn English. I thought I had to study English because I wanted to join an English department in University. I was motivated (Interview #1, p.19).” In her case, her interests in English music and her dream to be a music promoter supported her learning English.

Mr. Makita was also a music lover. He had worked 2 years and 9 months at a senior high school. Then he quit his job and started working as an English conversation instructor at a private institute.

Before he started learning English in junior high school, he had been exposed to English at home. His father was an owner of an English school and he attended some of the classes. In junior high school he was surprised. He said, “I remember that when I took the first term examination of the first year in junior high school, I was very surprised. I couldn’t do well at all … I hadn’t learned English as I thought I had … as a subject (Interview #1, p.7).” He studied hard. He stated, “And my scores on the final were much better. And I caught up with the class. And since then, I liked English in the first and the second years of junior high school (Interview #1, p.8).”

His honeymoon with school English did not last long. In senior high school, he stopped studying English. He said, “In the first year, I took 1 in English [on the school report], out of 10. And I thought that it would be fine with me. I just

gave up (Interview #1, p.12).” He did not abandon English but did school English.

Music was his life saver. He said, “I was saved by that [music] … If I didn’t have that [i.e. encounter with English music] I would not be here now (Interview #1, p.13).” He mentioned groups from America and the U.K., such as TOTO, YES, BOSTON, CHICAGO, and QUEEN. He listened to their music repeatedly and tried to make exactly same sounds. “I listened to them over and over. I couldn’t make the same sounds as in their songs. It was frustrating (Interview #1, p.12),” he said. Mr. Makita enjoyed pronunciation practice with music and it helped him to be motivated to learn English.

The other two participants felt speaking English was cool. Ms. Satoh was ready to study English when she joined the junior high school. Unfortunately, “The class in school was easy for me, and boring. It was VERY boring (Interview #1, p.9),” she said. She learned English at JUKU (cram school) and by listening to the radio language program called KISO-EEGO (Basic English).

And when I was in the first year of junior high school, my friend and I memorized the dialogues from the program and on the way to school and way home, we acted them out, like a game … It wasn’t difficult at all. (Interview #1, p.16)

She was not satisfied with the lessons at school, so she started learning English herself. Why was she so motivated to learn English?

As she said in the excerpt, Ms. Satoh enjoyed memorizing dialogues and acting them out as a game. In this game she did not need to buy anything expensive, and her parents thought this game was safe to play. She explained as “This game was not a game that anybody would blame you to play or not a game you had to play behind your parents’ backs. For me learning English was a (safe) game (Interview #1, pp.17-18).” This game was cool to play. Ms. Satoh explained her feeling as follows: “I felt it was, like fashion, cool … Pronouncing words we didn’t know was cool. I couldn’t express that coolness by myself. I needed something to say. Any sentences were fine, as far as they were in

English, as far as they were correct sentences. So the printed sentences of the textbook were good. And reading them fluently was cool (Interview #1, p.45).” She enjoyed expressing her coolness by uttering English sentences.

Ms. Noda was also ready to learn English when she joined junior high school. Again, ‘cool’ was the key word. She said, “My father wrote my name in alphabets and I was VERY interested in that (writing alphabets). It was cool. So (I learned) writing alphabets in elementary school. I just did so since it was cool (Interview #1, pp.3-4).”

TV programs promoted her motivation too. She talked about her favorite TV programs as follows: “Of course I had interests in foreign cultures, around that time. I found foreign countries and cultures irresistible and watched those kinds of TV programs ... Something about traveling to other countries or introduction of other cultures and so on ... Sesame Street, of course (Interview #1, p.8).”

Ms. Noda studied English in junior high school with already fostered motivation. She “memorized all the sentences in the textbook, especially with grammar points (Interview #1, p.20).” When she found she was successful in learning English in school, she was more motivated to learn it, as if her success in class fueled her learning motivation.

As seen in the experiences of four participants, integrative motivation worked in preparation for learning English, and when their learning in school did not go well, such as when they did not like their English teachers and their grades were not, it supported their learning.

Group B - Learning from skills

Unlike the participants in Group A, two other participants, Ms. Koike and Mr. Yamamoto did not emphasize their interests toward English cultures. They were motivated rather by their own learning, such as test scores and grades.

Ms. Koike liked English. In the answer to the question, “What was the most interesting thing in learning English?” she said, “I think the feeling that I could understand it attracted me. That feeling “I could understand English” I guess ...

I could understand it so I studied and the test scores were good (Interview #1, p.8).” She liked English because she could understand the meanings in English.

This feeling that I can understand English pushed her to work hard later in a shape of anxiety. She could not skip preparation for English lessons. “I didn’t fail to preview for the next lesson (Interview #1, p.15).” She continued, “I don’t know why but I thought I had to prepare for English lessons. I was afraid that I could not understand, especially in English class. So when I was in senior high school I really hated to take a lesson without preparation (Interview #1, p.16).” Attending class unprepared meant to her that she might not be able to understand the lessons, and it became anxious.

For Ms. Koike English was an essential skills for passing the entrance examinations. She said, “I really didn’t want to fail that private senior high school, and I thought I had to study very hard … especially English. At that time and through my junior high school days, the grades of English were good, and I liked [English] and was good at it, so [I had to] work hard. I liked it so I wanted to work hard (Interview #1, p.14).” Ms. Koike liked English and studied it hard, and because of her hard work her grades were good. She knew she could get good scores on English tests and recognized English as her strong point on examinations. She needed good scores on examinations, so she studied English harder than before. That was her cycle of learning English.

When Mr. Yamamoto started to learn English he could not write alphabets well. He said, “On the first term examination in junior high school, I cannot forget, but there was a question “What’s your name?” and I couldn’t answer that. I could not write my name in alphabets (Interview #1, p.3).” After that his English teacher helped him to write in alphabets for 3 years. He thought his foundation of English proficiency was built through this period.

His teacher had him write English words repeatedly and this activity strengthened his writing ability. He said, “That teacher thought, maybe, vocabulary was important, and had us write English words many times … It might sound strange but I felt accomplishment in that activity, and it gave me confidence (Interview #1, pp.12-13).”

Then he noticed that he “could answer [the questions asked] often in class

(Interview #1, p.11)” and his “grades were good (Interview #1, p.11).” He continued, “As for writing, I felt superior to other students (Interview #1, p.12).” At the end he became fond of English.

Completing writing activities that his teacher gave fostered his confidence and English competence. Then Mr. Yamamoto became more confident and liked English. As the result of his learning, he felt more familiar to English.

Of course these two participants liked English as other participants did. But their learning motivation was enhanced with their successful experiences in learning.

Discussion

The participants of Group A expressed their love to English cultures. This love became integrative motivation and supported their language learning. As Takashi (1992) pointed out there is a tendency among Japanese people to have a desire “to identify themselves as members of a cosmopolitan society (p.133).” This tendency might be the origin of their love to English cultures.

In the present study the participants’ integrative motivation was illustrated as a learning preparation factor and a learning supporter. If one likes the culture of the target language that prepares the person to be motivated to learn that language. Language learning can be said to start before actual learning takes place.

In Group B, the two participants, Ms. Koike and Mr. Yamamoto were more motivated by resultative motivation (Skehan, 1989). This motivation is seen when the results of learning promotes learner’s motivation to learn. In their cases, it seems that resultative motivation is fore-grounded and, of course, integrative motivation is there back-grounded.

This back-grounding and fore-grounding structure can be the key to understand learning motivation. There are several different motivations to be identified (McInerney and Van Etten, 2004, Skehan, 1989). These motivations are often categorized in two groups, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000), and instrumental integrative

motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). It might, however, be possible that there are different motivations but some motivations are fore-grounded and others are back-grounded. This fore-grounding and back-grounding arrangement changes, as spot lights move from one actor to another on stage, from time to time. What causes this change is to be investigated in the future research.

Conclusions

For Ms. Takayama, Ms. Reiko Yukawa was her idol and representation of good English speakers. Mr. Makita and Ms. Satoh copied what native speakers said. In other words, native speakers were their model. In Mr. Yamamoto's case, his teacher guided him to study English. If having a model or a guide in language learning is deeply connected to learning motivation, teacher's role as a learner model in class might be more important than it is said now. In that sense, non-native language teachers are needed as well as native speakers of the target languages.

For years, Japanese English teachers' English proficiency has been targeted in discussion of teacher education. Providing as many opportunities to improve their English as possible in pre-service and in-service training will nurture their confidence. We need more good language learner models to motivate our students to learn English.

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