

Situating the Expectancy-Value Model of Motivation in EFL in Japan

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Introduction

A lack of motivation is one of the most cited reasons for poor student performance in the language classroom in Japan (Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001). For years, teachers and educators have been trying to understand and deal with the problem, but it remains as important an issue today as it was thirty years ago when researchers began investigating the relationship between language learning and motivation. The expectancy-value model is composed of the expectancy for succeeding at reaching a goal and the value associated with the goal. Although the model is not comprehensive, it provides a good rationale for apathy in the classroom. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief overview of historical and current approaches to motivation and position the expectancy-value theory within the Japanese social milieu.

Historical Developments

Gardner is well known as the first researcher to extensively explore motivation as an achievement variable in L2. His major contribution was the socio-educational model, which divided motivation into two parts: integrative and instrumental (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1985). The integrative orientation is the desire to identify with people in the target culture or community, while instrumental motivation reflects the usefulness of the target language. Students were considered instrumentally motivated if they were studying the language to improve their employability or course

grades. The socio-educational model became the dominant interpretation of motivation until the 1980's, when competing theories began to challenge the tenets of the model. A watershed in language motivation research was a paper by Crookes and Schmidt (1990). In it, they called for a re-examination of L2 motivation and research into applying motivation variables in psychology and education. They also emphasized the importance of including classroom and task variables into motivation models. Their paper prompted L2 researchers to investigate many new theories of motivation. As a result, the number of papers on motivation increased sharply and educators were beginning to see motivation as a much more complex concept than previously thought.

Current Approaches

Oxford and Shearin (1994) had responded to Crookes and Schmidt's article by integrating motivation theories from other disciplines into L2. These theories included need theories, instrumentality theories, equity theories, and reinforcement theories. Needs theories are well known in psychology and derived from Maslow's (1970) needs hierarchy, which assumes humans are driven to prioritize and satisfy their needs. According to Oxford and Shearin, needs theories are effective for addressing anxiety in the classroom. Vroom (1964), an industrial psychologist, used the term "instrumentality" to refer to the subjective probability that the result of an action leads to the desired outcome. Instrumentality mirrors Atkinson's (1957) earlier expectancy-value construct. The two theories share an emphasis on motivation as a function of expectancy (the probability of success) and value or valence (the subjective importance of the potential outcome). Goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) concentrates on the nature of goals and how they are set and achieved. Equity theories assume an individual's behaviour is partly dependent on a comparison between the inputs (efforts and investments) and outputs or outcomes of an action. Reinforcement theories consider the manipulation of rewards and penalties as important factors in motivation. Although Oxford and Shearin's coverage of the models was rather brief and uncritical, it had built on Crookes and Schmidt's (1991) paper by integrating educational and psychology motivation theories into the field of

language learning.

Dornyei (2001), perhaps more than any other current L2 researcher, has examined and summarized recent motivation theories in education and psychology. The common thread in most, if not all, of these theories is the stress on cognitive and social-cognitive variables in motivation. The integration of social and cultural beliefs with contingency factors into motivation models has complicated matters but has given valuable insights into student motivation. However, there is still no overarching theory of L2 motivation and Gardner's theory of integrative and instrumental orientations remains widely discussed, although it is slowly being eclipsed by newer approaches.

Expectancy-value

Expectancy-value theory is related to other cognitive approaches through its emphasis on the student's perception of their learning situation. Atkinson (1957, 1964) defines expectancy as the subjective probability of success and value as the incentive value of success. Due to an error in the formulation of his model, Atkinson focused primarily on the expectancy variable of the construct. However, later theorists, most notably Eccles and colleagues (Eccles et al.; 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), began to investigate and expand the value component to include attainment value (the value of doing well on a task), intrinsic value (personal enjoyment of task), cost (the negative value of the task and the value of the task that was compromised to engage in the chosen task), and utility value (usefulness). In terms of expectancy, Bandura (1977) included the distinction between efficacy expectations (the student's belief of how well they can meet the goal) and outcome expectations (the probability that a certain behaviour will lead to the goal). In the field of language learning, Gardner's (1968) instrumental motivation was closely related to the utility construct in early psychology motivation models. However, many of these early concepts of value or utility were simple and one-dimensional. Additional aspects such as attainment value, intrinsic value, and cost were absent from L2 models until Dornyei (2001) synthesized various theories from L2, psychology, and education

Not discussed in L2 literature is the difference between EFL and ESL in terms of

motivation and expectancy-value theory. Oxford (1996) and Dornyei (1990) discuss motivation differences in EFL and ESL students but only in reference to Gardner's instrumental and integrative orientations. They argued that instrumental orientation, which is analogous to utility in expectancy-value theory, was more significant for understanding motivation in EFL students. Learning English in a country or area where it is rarely used is quite different than learning it in an environment where it is very common. One important difference between EFL and ESL is how social influences interact with individual expectancies and values.

To get a clearer picture of how value and expectancy interacts with the EFL environment in Japan, I will use part of Eccles and Wigfield's (2002) model mentioned above. The first component, interest or enjoyment value, is not included in the analysis because it is conceptually vague and more related to task than the broader social assessments that are the focus of this paper. The second is attainment value or the importance of doing well. Like the first component, this is more closely tied to self-identity and personality traits rather than social influences. The third component is relative cost, which includes anxiety, fear of failure, and the unattractiveness of other options. Utility value, the fourth and most consequential component, is the perceived practical value of the goal or task.

The value of English

English courses are required as part of the national curriculum. This stipulation reflects the government's judgment that English has some value. However, motivation researchers often confuse the value stated by government policy with the value set by the market. Despite government claims that English is essential, there is much evidence that society believes the opposite. For many Japanese university students, English has little value. According to a Daily Yomiuri survey in 2000 (cited in Burden, 2002), 66% of 1,918 respondents showed negative attitudes towards studying English. Miyazato (2001) acknowledges that university students in rural areas in Japan are poorly motivated to study English because it is simply not useful. When the Japanese Science and Technology Agency (1998) administered a forced-choice survey asking corporations what they look for in a researcher, only 1.9% responded with

“language ability.” It appears that corporations as well as students place little value on the importance of learning English.

The Japanese government ostensibly values the study of English. It has been a part of the government’s education policy for many years and is a required subject for all high school students and most, if not all, university students. The government has also invested in the JET program, study abroad programs, and the Japanese standardized test of English (STEP). Corporations, too, have invested in language programs for many years but recently their number has declined. As a percentage of corporate budgets, sizable or even moderate investments in English learning are rare. The government and many corporations claim to value English but there is little evidence that it is necessary in either public or private business. Outside most government buildings there will be bilingual Japanese and English signs, but inside, it is very rare to encounter even rudimentary English. Appearances of a high value of English can be deceiving and most university students realize this.

The government and society believe English has value. But how important is it? Finding a job or pursuing one’s career rarely requires English. The ability to speak it is not likely to significantly increase work or academic opportunities. Doctors, lawyers, business leaders, and public officials generally do not need English unless they are in specialist disciplines. Therefore, the utility value of English is very limited for most Japanese university students. It is not surprising that many of them show little enthusiasm for the subject. This is not a criticism of how well or poorly the Japanese speak English, but an appeal to evaluate the use and need of English when discussing motivation and determining policy.

Motivation researchers often wrongly assume that English or the foreign language is valuable and problems of motivation are due to task variables, methodological variables, or learning styles. Noels, Pelletier, Clement, and Vallerand (2000) argued that it may be necessary to teach students who do not find the study of French as a foreign language personally relevant that learning French is indeed “interesting and enjoyable.” Their assertion implies that the students’ perceptions are wrong and that the high utility of learning a foreign language is unquestionable. When faced with student’s complaints of the low value of the language they are learning, Oxford and Shearin (1994) and Takakubo (2002) respond by blaming methodology. Miyazato

(2001) admits that her students do not need English but believes that they will be more motivated to study it through team-teaching. Changing teaching methods may make tasks more enjoyable but will not change the students' value perceptions or their motivation beyond the task level. Moreover, the students' perception of the value of English is closely tied to society, so attitudes will not change until there is increased demand and need for English in government, business, and other social institutions. Examining students' perception of the usefulness of the foreign language they are studying should be a fundamental element in any EFL motivation model. Cost is also an important motivational determinant. Learning a first or second language is difficult and can take five to ten years to master. Compared to learning accounting, computer programming, economics, or literature, acquiring a new language requires much more time and effort to succeed and involves more anxiety. The relatively high effort and time costs decrease the perceived value of studying English and can negatively affect motivation.

Expectancy

At the course and task level, the expectancy construct plays a less prominent role than in larger or longer term contexts. Most English courses are norm-referenced and testing is usually on knowledge of discrete items in a limited domain. Students are likely to have higher expectancies for classroom tasks because evaluation is norm-referenced. Most students can expect "average" performance. However, when goals are distant and difficult to define, expectancy varies and is difficult to maintain. For a beginning student, an example of a distant goal would be achieving fluency in English or scoring highly on a large-scale standardized test such as TOEIC. This goal is much more difficult than the goal of successfully completing a role-play exercise in class. Large-scale norm referenced tests or criterion-based tests use much larger test domains and therefore require long-term expectancies. Self-efficacy, or the perceived ability to perform at required levels (Bandura, 1977), is closely related to expectancy, and is needed to sustain motivational levels through the vicissitudes of learning English. Without high self-efficacy and expectancy, students are unlikely to sustain motivation levels over long periods.

Attitudes towards the expectancy of success, like value, can be learned from the social environment. Burden (2002) and Miyazato (2001) concluded that most Japanese students perceive English as a difficult language. The students' view reflects poor expectancy for English ability. The lower TOEFL scores of the Japanese compared to their Asian and European counterparts' scores is often cited as evidence that the Japanese are poor at English. Reedy (2000) refutes this claim, arguing that the statistics are misread and that the Japanese are on par with other nationalities that write the test. Nevertheless, common is the perception in Japan that Japanese EFL students perform poorly on TOEFL and TOEIC. The low expectancies for success in English are partially based on the students' perceptions that they cannot be good at English. Despite the lack of research on expectations, I believe most EFL teachers would agree that Japanese students and society have low expectations for success in learning a relatively intermediate or advanced level of English. When society believes learning and achieving a high-level of English is difficult, students are likely to believe it also and question the purpose of studying the language.

Conclusion

Like any motivation theory, expectancy-value theory is not comprehensive, but it provides a good explanation of some of the unique aspects of learning English in Japan. In ESL environments, expectations to acquire English are higher because many non-native speakers successfully use it and as the dominant or official language its high value is assumed. Every EFL environment or society that allocates resources for English instruction, implicitly and explicitly assigns a level of value to English ability. Explicit value judgments are usually in the form of government or media policy. Implicit value judgments are determined by the market's demand for English. If these values differ, students' assumptions, expectations, and value judgments will be determined by market value.

The purpose of this paper was to provide a brief description of language motivation theories and to define and apply the expectancy-value theory to English language instruction in Japan. I argued that the expectancy-value model contributes to our understanding of poor motivation in the EFL classroom. My comments are not an

indictment against the English ability of Japanese or EFL in Japan; rather they are meant to explain an overlooked but significant facet of motivation. Students' expectancy for success, perceptions of competence, and assessment of the usefulness of learning English form the basis of their efforts and achievement. Understanding these perceptions and their causes improves educators' abilities to provide solutions to problems with motivation in the language classroom.

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