

An Empirical Study of the Language Learners' Dynamic Process of Motivation

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Abstract

Many researches emphasize the importance of the integrative motivation and these researches seem to marginalize the instrumental motivation and the dynamic change of the learning motivation. An empirical study is conducted in this thesis. 22 English major graduates from Henan University of Economics and Law are as subjects. Mainly by doing the questionnaire and interview, the data can be collected. The result shows the instrumental motivation helps learners' success of second language acquisition. And the learning motivation can be dynamic because of some impacts. Besides, the transformed motivation can last long.

Key words: Instrumental motivation; Integrative motivation; English teaching; SLA

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INTRODUCTION

In research on motivation, it is considered to be an internal process that gives behavior energy, direction and persistence in research (in other words, it gives behavior strength, purpose, and sustainability) (Reeve, 2014). From the very beginning of SLA, motivation was not the crucial part influencing the success or failure of SLA. However,

now, there are a number of language learner motivation models that are developed and postulated in fields such as linguistics and sociolinguistics, with relations to second-language acquisition in a classroom setting. The different perspectives on L2 motivation can be divided into three distinct phases: the social psychological period, the cognitive-situated period and the process-oriented period (Dörnyei, 2014).

Social psychological perspectives on L2 learning motivation emphasize the role of the individuals' social context and social interactions. The social psychological period in L2 motivation research flourished in the bilingual context of Canada from 1959 through 1990 (Dörnyei, 2014; Ushioda, 2012). During this period, Gardner developed the socio-educational model, while Clément and colleagues explored the theory of linguistic self-confidence. As for the cognitive-situated period, a major example of a cognitive-based theory is Ushioda's "attribution theory." The theory contends that the causal reasons a student attributes to his or her past performance play a critical role in her motivation in future endeavors within that area (Ushioda, 2012). Researchers during the "process-oriented" period studied motivation as being dynamic, fluctuating within a semester, a year, and a life time. This period consisted mainly of two different models by Dörnyei in the late 1990s and early 2000s: the process model and the motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2014).

In this thesis, Gardner and Lambert's motivation category is adopted: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation (Liu, Zhu, & Peng, 2006). About the studies on the integrative motivation, quite a lot researches prove that integrative motivation makes great contributions to SLA. Some scholars prove that integrative attitude follows second language acquisition and the two interact with each other (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004). Also some findings support that class room activity which enhances integrative motivation can increase student success in the foreign language

classroom (Hernández, 2006). Moreover, integrative motivation is found to be the merely significant predictor of academic adaptation (Yu & Downing, 2012). Students with integrative motivation significantly outperformed those who were motivated instrumentally (Gholami, Allahyar, & Rafik-Galea, 2012). From these researches, although their emphases are different, they all point that integrative motivation is essential in SLA. And integratively motivated students perform excellently in SLA. Most researchers are attached to a belief that integrative motivation is positively associated with the success of SLA. And it seems that they ignore the instrumental motivation and the dynamic change of the motivation.

Therefore, this thesis produces an empirical study and aims to figure out whether the instrumental motivation also plays an important role in the success of SLA and if there are some changes of motivation. Additionally, the score of TEM-8 is the reflection of the result of SLA. Based on the teaching style of the TEM-8 teacher and students' performance, three hypotheses are proposed firstly: (a) When instrumental motivation (pass the TEM-8, for example) meets with the instrumental teaching, it is more possible to achieve the goal; (b) If the learners achieve the goal of instrumental motivation, there is a tendency to transform instrumental motivation into integrative motivation; (c) The transformed integrative motivation cannot last for long.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 Subjects

The subjects investigated are 22 English major students who finished their undergraduate courses in Henan University of Economics and Law in July, 2018. They were in the same TEM-8 class in 2018.

1.2 Methods

Three research methods are mainly employed in this study. First, it is the questionnaire with 15 questions partly based on the motivation aspect of Sakui and Gaies in 1999 (Liu, Zhu, & Peng, 2006). Second, semi-structured interview and stimulated recall are adopted for secondary verification. Last, observation is used.

1.3 Data Collection

By doing questionnaire, the motivation of learning English will be found out. By doing interview, we can learn whether the motivations of subjects are transformed. By doing interview and observation, we can know whether the transformed motivations last long.

2. DATA ANALYSIS

The data are collected from June, 2019 to October, 2019 in order to make sure the reliability of the analysis.

2.1 The Analysis of hypothesis (a): The Importance of Instrumental Motivation

Motivation is an important factor which influences the SLA and it is also a crucial factor that affects the second language efficiency. And one of the five learners' belief of Horwitz's survey is motivation (Horwitz, 1987). Integrative motivation means the learners really hope to fit into the language culture more than just outsiders. While instrumental motivation means that learners may make efforts to learn an L2 for some functional reasons-to pass an examination, to get a better job, or to get a place at university, etc.

Table 1
The Reason for Learning English

Main reason	Percentage
To pass the TEM-8	81.8%
To improve personal knowledge	95.4%
To go with the tide of world development	86.4%
To know the target culture for communication	86.4%
Just like English	63.6%
Others	9%

From Table 1, we can see that the top three reasons for learning English is – to improve personal knowledge, to go with the tide of world development and to know the target culture for communication. Only the last reason is integrative motivation. However, when we did the interview and asked the subjects why they want to know the target culture for communication, almost 60% subjects said they would do English-related job, like foreign trade, therefore, the deep reason behind this motivation is also about being qualified in work. As a result, it is safe to come to the conclusion that the top three motivations are to improve personal knowledge, to go with the tide of world development and to pass the TEM-8; and in the period of the last year of university, these subjects were occupied by the stress of TEM-8 or the entrance examination for postgraduate schools.

Two items in the questionnaire shall be emphasized: “During the preparation of TEM-8, I often felt too anxious to listen to the teacher Ding carefully” and “Most of my time in the class, instead of following the instruction, I always do some other irrelevant things”. The two items are used to make sure the efficiency of the TEM-8 class teaching. Because if many subjects are so anxious that they cannot listen to the teacher carefully, or if they just do their own homework or paper ignoring teacher's instruction, this instrumental teaching is useless. And then these subjects will have no contribution to this study. The percentage of such subjects is as Figure 1.

From Figure 1, the percentage of the truth of this proposition is 18.19%. Only 4 students were quite anxious in the class. It means the analysis which is based on these subjects remains effective.

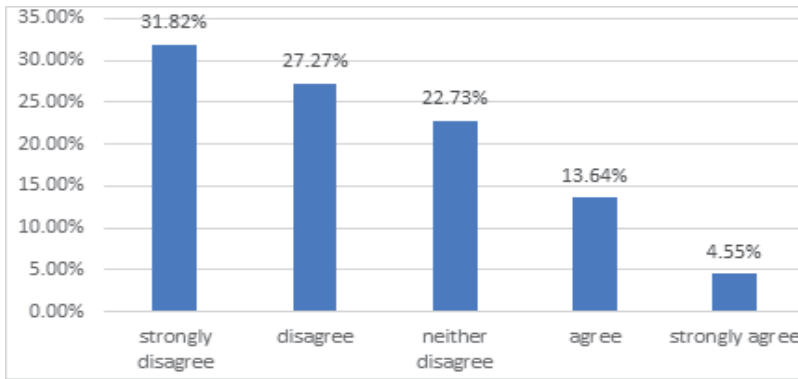


Figure 1
 Scale for proposition: I was always so anxious in TEM-8 class that I could not listen carefully

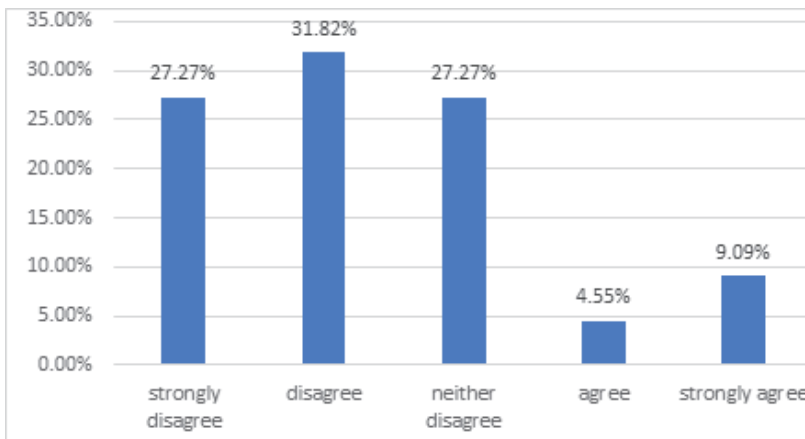


Figure 2
 Scale for proposition: I always did other things in the TEM-8 class ignoring what the teacher said

From Figure 2, the percentage of this proposition is 13.64%. That's to say only 3 students were doing other things during the class. And by doing the interview, there are actually 3 subjects who not only felt quite anxious but also always did other irrelevant thing. Another 1 subject just felt anxious.

From these data, it is concluded that almost all the subjects were listening to the instrumental class carefully which lays the indispensable prerequisite of the validity and reliability of this empirical study.

The Figure 3 shows, how many subjects pass the TEM-8:

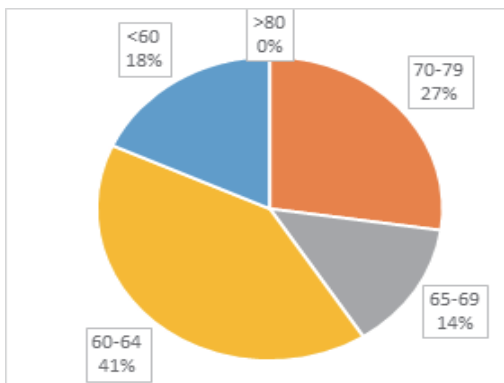


Figure 3
 Score of TEM-8

Only 18.18% (equal to 4 students) of the subjects did not pass the examination. To some extent, it shows that this TEM-8 class was effective and practical.

Based on the analysis, hypothesis (a) is confirmed. For making sure the truth of hypothesis (a), interview was followed for secondary verification. The interviewees claimed that during that period (the last year of university), their motivation of learning English was instrumental rather than integrative. Therefore, when the teaching instruction has little use to pass the test, most of them (19 subjects) chose to do their own thing like doing the previous TEM-8 papers. And they ignored what the teacher said. Only one of the interviewees said during that period, her motivation was integrative because she was attached to belief that the first function of language was communication and students should learn the knowledge during a class for better communication. But it still can be concluded that when instrumental teaching corresponds with instrumental motivation (pass the TEM-8, for example), it is more possible to achieve the goal than non-instrumental teaching.

2.2 The Analysis of Hypothesis (b): The Condition of Motivation Transformation

For confirming whether the hypothesis (b) is true or false, the subjects whose first motivation was integrative

shall be excluded. According to Table 1, there are 13 subjects who really like learning English. Hence, the left 9 subjects' first motivation is instrumental.

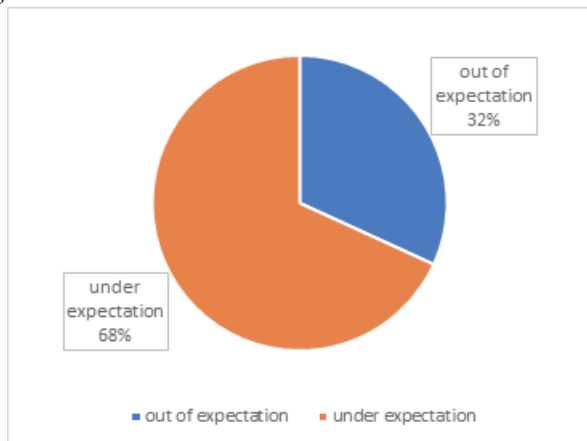


Figure 4
Quantity of the out-of-expectation score of TEM-8

The Figure 4 manifests the 22 subjects' expectation of the results of TEM-8. It can be seen that there are 7 subjects whose scores are out of exception. Among them, six students believed that they could not pass the test and one thought he could pass the exam but he did not.

However, 13 subjects conceived that they were really enjoyed learning English. Therefore, the interview shall start from the other 9 subjects, whose dominant motivation was absolutely not integrative. By asking them whether their scores were out of expectation, the interviewer knows four subjects' scores were out of their expectations.

When those four subjects were asked, their answers were surprisingly the same. They said they were so surprised than ever when they knew they passed the test and they came to be aware that their English was not as poor as they had imagined. Passing the TEM-8 gave them a sense of triumph and made them realize they could learn English well. At the very beginning, they did not think they were good learners, not mention passing the TEM-8. Therefore, it is proved that hypothesis (b) if the learners achieve the goal of instrumental motivation, there is a tendency to transform instrumental motivation into integrative motivation is true.

As for the other 5 subjects whose scores were under expectations, they passed the test, but they still do not show much interest in learning English. Moreover, when the interviewer asked why, they said they keep learning English in order to be qualified in work. Besides, two of the five subjects are working in the field which had little relevance to English. They said their passing of this test did not bring them too much impact. And they thought as English major students, it was shameful if they failed the test. They seldom learn English now except watching English movies or TV series. From this aspect, hypothesis (b) is false.

Compared with the 2 groups, they demonstrate that when the score of TEM-8 is out of English learner's expectation, it is very possible for them to find out their talent in learning English. This conclusion corresponds to the Ushioda's "attribution theory" mentioned before which contends that the causal reasons a student attributes to his or her past performance play a critical role in her motivation in future endeavors within that area. The learners' past performance - the score of TEM-8 makes contributions to their future motivation transformation.

2.3 The Analysis of Hypothesis (c): The Persistence of Transformed Motivation

As for hypothesis (c), it has been one and a half year after they took the exam. From the analysis of the hypothesis (b), we know that there are four subjects whose scores are out of their expectation. And they become to like learning English, which manifests their motivation is transformed. Therefore, whether these four subjects' transformed motivation can last long is the key to the truth or falsity of hypothesis (c).

One of the four subjects is not working in the field that is related to English, but she still keeps learning English. When the interviewer asked her why she still learnt English, she said that although she is not in the work which has no relevance to English now, she does not think giving up learning English is a wise choice. And after she passed the TEM-8, she became interested in English now. This interviewee's words impressed the interviewer a lot, and she said "Three years accompany day and night, I didn't know I have the potential to learn and love English. But when my school life is over, I found so. My delight, my excitement, is the same as Columbus's discovery of a new land." And she added that society needs interdisciplinary talents and keeping learning English will be helpful for her career. As for the other three subjects, some of them start their further education and some are doing the job relating to English. Through interviewing, I know they enjoy their journey. Furthermore, in their daily sharing in the WeChat or QQ moments, I observe they often posted some photos of English conference, or daily photos with English explanation. And they often use more English represent in their WeChat or QQ moments. These behaviors demonstrate that they are proud of being an English major. Based on the interview and observation, hypothesis (c) is not confirmed in this study.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it is clear to realize that when instrumental teaching corresponds with instrumental motivation, it is quite possible to achieve the goal. And in this TEM-8 preparation period, it is the instrumental motivation that is in the dominant position, and the teacher's instruction corresponds with this motivation

perfectly, so only 18.18% of the subjects did not pass the test. Moreover, if the teacher's teaching is non-instrumental, 86.36% will not listen to the teacher, which will lead to the low efficiency of the class. Therefore, firstly, TEM-8 class is meaningful. Secondly, due to the truth of this hypothesis, the meaning to the class teaching is that the class design should correspond with the need of students to know what they want to learn in a class. As for the beginners, maybe they do not know what they expect so far, the teacher can tell them what can be developed in the class and ask them what kind of prolongation they prefer. After this sort of investigation, English teachers will get their direction in the future class design. One point shall be emphasized, students' need is dynamic. The teacher should focus on the change. Just like one saying from the Communist Part of China: doing everything for the masses, relying on them in every task, carrying out the principle of "from the masses, to the masses."

As for hypothesis (b), if the learners do not have so much confidence in passing the TEM-8, but at last they make it. In this kind of situation, learners' instrumental motivation can be transformed into integrative motivation. Therefore, it can be inferred that if there happens something that is out of expectation impacts on the learners, like praise from teacher of expert, winning a prize, etc., it can arouse the learner's interests. And it will be quite helpful for them to become integrative-motivation-forced students. What's more, it can be inferred that if something impacts on the learners, like out-of-expectation praise from teacher or expert, winning a prize, etc., it is likely to stir the interests or passion of the learners. That is to say, impacts can bring change of the motivation of learners. What's more, according to the observation, in university, teachers have something in common like they concern that students are almost adults, they do not need praise as much as primary school children, and what they need is learning the professional skills well. In fact, it is not.

Last, as for hypothesis (c), the transformed integrative motivation can last for long. But it is just responsible for this study because the subjects is limited. One problem shall be pointed out, there is no students whose score of TEM-8 is more than 80 or even between 70 and 79. But the reason remains unclear. Maybe it is because the dominant motivation is not integrative motivation.

All in all, language learners' motivation is dynamic. Instrumental motivation plays an important role in

SLA. It shall not be marginalized. Moreover, teachers' performance and feedback is also of great importance. This result shows the consistency of the prediction the study of this field: the possible avenues for future research of motivation involve teacher motivation and teacher-student interface. The principal reason for interest in these areas is evidence showing that teacher performance (a product of a teacher's motivation) can have a profound effect on student motivation and, consequently, on student success (Goodridge, 2017). Therefore, not only learner but also foreign language teacher shall pay attention to this aspect. If doing so, SLA and second language teaching can achieve multiplier progress.

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