

Second language learning and acculturation: The role of motivation and goal content congruence

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This study explored how having differing goals and motives for learning a second language influences adaptation in the foreign culture. Specifically, we compared English as a second language (ESL) students in two programs, which differed in their long-term goal orientations. Some students were taking ESL courses in order to attend university in their second language, whereas other ESL students took courses that were not followed by an immediate reward. Students in both programs completed measures of acculturation as well as measures of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for learning English. We found that adaptation to the foreign culture, in the form of acculturation, is best facilitated by congruence between students' motives and goals. The findings are discussed in terms of their methodological and pedagogical implications.

Cette étude se penche sur les buts poursuivis et les motivations à apprendre une langue seconde, et leur influence sur l'adaptation à une culture étrangère. De façon plus précise, nous avons comparé des étudiants apprenant l'anglais comme langue seconde (ALS) inscrits à deux programmes différents selon leurs buts à long terme. Certains étudiants prenaient les cours d'ALS afin d'entreprendre éventuellement des études universitaires dans cette langue alors que d'autres prenaient des cours d'ALS à des fins autres. Les étudiants des deux groupes ont complété des mesures d'acculturation ainsi que des mesures de motivations intrinsèque et extrinsèque quant à leur apprentissage de l'anglais. Notre étude révèle que l'adaptation à la culture canadienne-anglaise est facilitée par le degré de congruence entre les motivations et les buts poursuivis par les participants. Ces résultats sont interprétés à la lumière de leurs retombées pédagogique et méthodologique.

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Introduction

Reasons for learning a second language (L2) vary widely from person to person. Some people may learn an L2 for the pure intrinsic enjoyment that comes with learning a new language while others may learn an L2 in order to obtain the extrinsic reward of a better salary (Noels, Pelletier, Clément and Vallerand, 2000). In addition, people differ in the content of their language learning goals. To accommodate these goals, language schools are often geared toward differing outcomes. Language learning goals and motives are central concepts in L2 learning research (Gardner, 1985, 2000). To date, however, it is not known how having differing goals and motives for learning an L2 influences adaptation in the foreign culture. This adaptation process, referred to as acculturation, corresponds to the changes that occur when individuals from different cultures come into continuous and direct contact (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits, 1936; Berry, 1997; Castro, 2003). Given that learning an L2 in a foreign country requires individuals to live in a different culture, face exposure to unfamiliar experiences and to some degree, adapt to the new culture (Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000; Roccas, Horenczyk and Schwartz, 2000), understanding the relationship between motives, goals and acculturation could be crucial to foreigners' experiences. The goal of this study is to examine how motives and goals work together to impact L2 learners' acculturation to a foreign country.

Self-determination theory and second language learning

Reasons for learning an L2 can be classified according to the degree to which individuals freely choose to learn another language, i.e., the degree to which they are self-determined (Noels *et al.*, 2000; Noels, 2001a). From a self-determination perspective, motivational orientations are classified as extrinsic or intrinsic motivation¹ (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997; for a review, see Ryan and Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that exists because of the presence of “an externally mediated activity or constraint” (Deci, 1980, pp. 30–31). Extrinsically motivated activities are a means to an end. That is, the activity is performed, not for the enjoyment of the activity, but in order to gain a reward if the activity is completed or to avoid a negative consequence if the activity is not completed. For example, extrinsically motivated English as a second language (ESL) students may say that they are taking English classes in order to improve their chances of getting a good job.

Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation to fulfill a task that leads individuals to feel a sense of personal enjoyment and control when taking part in the task. When individuals' motivations are self-determined, they become more involved in activities and make efforts to reach challenging goals (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Intrinsically motivated activities are not a means to an end. They are the ends themselves; the motivation to perform an activity is for the

experience of the activity itself and not for the gain of future rewards (Deci, 1980). For example, ESL students who are intrinsically motivated may say that they are taking a grammar class because of their interest in how the rules of the English language operate.

To date, research has established that learning an L2 for personally satisfying, intrinsic reasons is linked to greater motivational intensity for learning the L2 (Noels, Clément and Pelletier, 2001), a higher likelihood of continuing foreign language education (Ramage, 1990), and self-efficacy, speaking proficiency and reading proficiency (Ehrman, 1996). Research has not examined, however, how individuals' motivations for learning an L2 interplay with their language learning goals.

Motives versus goals

The concept of motivations, or “why” individuals pursue a particular goal, has been differentiated from that of goals, or “what” goals are pursued (Kasser and Ryan, 1993; Deci and Ryan, 2000). Sheldon, Ryan, Deci and Kasser (2004) state that understanding why individuals carry out particular behaviours and what their behaviours are oriented toward are “two of the most important theoretical and empirical foci of motivation researchers” (p. 447).

Within the L2 literature, Gardner's (1985, 2000) socioeducational model of second language acquisition distinguishes between motives and goals for learning an L2, or what Gardner refers to as motivations and orientations. From this perspective, motivation refers to behaviour directed towards learning an L2 that is predicted by the effort with which individuals pursue L2 learning, a desire to learn the L2 and positive attitudes toward the learning situation. An orientation, on the other hand, refers to an individual's reason(s) for learning an L2. For example, an individual could be interested in strengthening his or her ties with the L2 community.

Self-determination theorists also distinguish between motives and goals. They describe the content of goal pursuits by the intrinsic or extrinsic nature of the aspirations (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996). The former refers to goals aimed to fulfill basic and psychological needs whereas the latter refers to goals that result in external rewards and approval. In the case of L2 learning, aspirations to take university classes in English would be an example of an extrinsic goal. On the other hand, learning an L2 with the aim of enhancing a sense of belonging within the L2 community may be considered an intrinsic goal.

Research has linked both self-determined motivations and intrinsic goal content with positive outcomes (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996), for example, have found that intrinsic aspirations are related to greater well-being and less distress. On the other hand, a disproportionate emphasis on extrinsic aspirations is negatively related to well-being and distress. Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon and Deci (2004) found that greater

processing, persistence and academic achievement occurred when learning activities were presented as an intrinsic goal rather than an extrinsic goal. Further, Sheldon *et al.* (2004), have found that self-determined motives and intrinsic goal contents uniquely predict positive well-being whereas controlled motives and extrinsic goal contents uniquely predicted negative well-being.

In line with Sheldon *et al.*'s (2004) emphasis on the importance of goals and motives, this study aims to examine the interplay between these two aspects. Given that individuals do pursue both intrinsic and extrinsic goals, it is important to understand the outcome of congruence and incongruence of motives and goals. Brunstein, Schultheiss and Grässman (1998) suggest that well-being is enhanced when motives are congruent with goals. In extending this assertion to the topic of L2 learning, the question becomes: Does congruence between language learning motives and goals enhance learners' well-being?

Research addressing the issue of congruence suggests that the more our reasons for performing specific behaviours are in line with long-term goals, the greater our chances of success become. For example, Hofer and Chasiotis (2003) assessed the importance of congruence between motives and goals among a sample of Zambian men by examining the moderating effects of achievement motives and affiliation motives on the relationship between achievement goals and life satisfaction and affiliation goals and life satisfaction, respectively. The researchers found that life satisfaction is highest in situations of congruency, where motives and goals are alike and highly endorsed.

Similarly, Sheldon and Kasser (1995) found the more consistent psychology students' lower level goals (e.g., daily behaviours) were with their higher level goals (e.g., long-term goals), the more they reported more optimal functioning in terms of feeling more energized, increased positive moods, greater life satisfaction and an enhanced ability or willingness to consider other's viewpoints. In the case of the current study, this research would suggest that despite the emphasis on intrinsic goals and motives, positive outcomes would be enhanced by congruence, even at the risk of pursuing extrinsic motives or goals.

Acculturation

Given that L2 learning is enhanced by contact with the L2 community (Clément, 1980; Noels and Clément, 1996), positive outcomes should speak to the learner's accommodation of this contact. That is, learning an L2 is "not simply learning new information (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.) which is part of [one's] own culture but rather acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community" (Gardner, 1979, p. 193). Further, a desire

or need to learn an L2 often results in individuals moving from their country of origin to a country where it is possible to be immersed in the L2. Taken together, these realities reflect the fact that those learning an L2 may have to contend with both their native culture and the culture of the L2 community.

The advent of bidimensional models of acculturation (Berry, 1980; Szapocznik, Kurtines and Fernandez, 1980) has allowed for the recognition of more than one cultural identity, each with independently varying strength (Ryder, Alden and Paulhus, 2000). According to Gardner (1979), because acquiring an L2 requires a person to include aspects of another culture into his or her own life space, “the student’s harmony with his own cultural community and his willingness or ability to identify with other cultural communities become important considerations in the process of L2 acquisition” (pp. 193–194). Acculturation experiences pertaining to both the native culture and the mainstream culture, therefore, represent a relevant psychological outcome of L2 learning. Further, the acculturative changes that occur when individuals from different cultures come into contact with each other are relevant to individual experience as they can impact the experience of stress (Donà and Berry, 1994), adaptation (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 1999) and psychological well-being (Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi and Cree, 2004).

The present research

The main goal of this research was to examine whether individuals with differing goals for learning ESL would be more acculturated when their motives were congruent or incongruent with their language learning goals. In this study, we capitalized on two naturally occurring L2 learning groups. Specifically, we examined students in ESL programs with two different reward structures.

The first group, the extrinsic reward structure class, focused on reading, writing and study skills required for admittance into a Canadian university. Accordingly, students enrolled in this course were working towards the future tangible reward of attending an English-speaking university. By comparison, the second group of classes, the intrinsic reward structure program focused on developing oral fluency, grammar, reading and writing skills without an immediate tangible reward.

Our operationalization of goal content is based on the reward structure of the ESL program attended. Past research (Noels, Clément and Pelletier, 1999; Noels, 2001b) has found that the learning environment can influence individuals’ motivations. For example, Noels *et al.* (2001a) found that students enrolled in a French as a second language program who perceived their language teacher’s communication to be positive and informative were more intrinsically motivated to learn an L2 than students who perceived their teacher’s communication to be controlling. Hence, if the immediate classroom environment

created by teachers' communication style can influence students' motives, then it seems plausible that the greater context of the program, such as its reward structure, might influence students' goals. A program that is oriented toward a specific reward, such as admittance to university, would incite extrinsic goals. Further, the fact that certain students chose an extrinsic reward structure class suggests that they would be predisposed to extrinsic goal orientations.

Hypotheses

We expected that acculturation to the mainstream culture would be best facilitated when goals and motives were congruent. Specifically, for the extrinsic reward structure program, we expected that the more extrinsically motivated these students were, the more they would be acculturated to the dominant culture. For the intrinsic reward structure program, we expected that the students would be more adjusted to Canada when their motivations for learning English were intrinsic and, therefore, congruent with their current activities. We also expected that for both the intrinsic and extrinsic reward structure groups, identifying with their own native culture, East Asia, would not be related to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for learning an L2. This hypothesis was formed based on the reality that adjustment to the home country precedes motivations to learn an L2.

Method

Participants

Students in the ESL program in the Continuing Education division at the University of Winnipeg participated in this study. They were enrolled in one of two programs. Students in the General English Program were learning English to develop oral fluency, grammar, reading and writing without an immediate tangible reward. Students in the Academic English Program were learning English for the immediate tangible goal of attending an English-speaking university. As a result, we considered students in the General English Program and Academic English Program to be in programs with intrinsic and extrinsic reward structures, respectively.

To ensure that participants would be able to comprehend the questionnaire we took several precautions. First, we only invited students in the upper level courses to participate. Upon consulting teaching staff and program coordinators, it was determined that these students would be capable of completing questionnaires in English. Second, we conducted pretests with students from each level to eliminate any difficult vocabulary or concepts. Finally, the last question on the questionnaire asked, "How much of the questionnaire did you understand?" Only participants who indicated that they "understood most" or "understood all" were included in the final analyses.

Sixty-eight students participated in this study. Participants were from East Asian countries (e.g., Japan, South Korea and China). Although East Asians do not constitute a single cultural group, these countries do share the philosophical underpinnings of Confucianism (Yum, 1997). As a result, participants from these countries share similar characteristics such as a high value for harmony, family, education, conformity and social relationships (Hecht, Jackson, Lindsay, Strauss and Johnson, 2001). Three participants from Sweden, Saudi Arabia and Mexico were excluded as their cultures, and therefore their responses, would likely be very dissimilar from those of the East Asian participants. We also excluded one participant who indicated that he had difficulty with understanding the questionnaire. The final sample included a total of 64 participants comprised of 40 intrinsic reward structure program participants (23 men and 17 women) and 24 extrinsic reward structure program participants (8 men and 16 women). They ranged in age from 18 to 30 years ($M = 22.11$).

Materials

Motivation

Participants' motivation to learn ESL was assessed with the Language Learning Orientations Scale (LLOS; Noels *et al.*, 2000). This scale represents a measure of self-determination. For the purpose of this research, we administered the intrinsic (Cronbach's alpha = .78) and extrinsic (Cronbach's alpha = .70) subscales. Each subscale is comprised of nine items that are answered on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).²

Acculturation

Acculturation was measured with the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA; Ryder *et al.*, 2000). This scale represents a measure of two dimensions of acculturation: adjustment to heritage (e.g., "I often participate in my native cultural traditions", Cronbach's alpha = .72) and adjustment to mainstream (e.g., "I often participate in mainstream Canadian cultural traditions", Cronbach's alpha = .66). Each dimension is comprised of ten questions. Responses are made on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The validity of the VIA has been shown across several ethnic groups. It also has the advantage of being relatively short in length.

Biographical

The last section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic information. In order to gain a better understanding of our sample, participants were asked to respond to questions about their age, length of time spent in an English-speaking country, length of time living in Canada, amount of English schooling before coming to Canada and amount of the questionnaire understood.

Table 1: Demographic variables as a function of the intrinsic (general) and extrinsic (academic) reward structure programs

Variables	General	Academic	df	t
Age	23.28 (2.44)	20.13 (1.30)	61	5.84*
Length of time in English-speaking country	3.54 (0.36)	3.86 (0.49)	62	-2.99*
Length of time in Canada	5.41 (3.81)	7.73 (7.35)	62	1.66
Length of English schooling prior to arriving in Canada	5.90 (3.35)	6.63 (3.80)	53	-0.75
Amount of questionnaire understood	4.33 (0.48)	4.71 (0.46)	61	-3.06*

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

* $p < .01$

Procedure

Students completed the questionnaire during class time. At the beginning of the testing session, the experimenter went over the basic format of the questionnaire to ensure that students clearly understood the instructions. She encouraged participants to ask questions and use dictionaries if they were unsure of words or concepts. Students were told that their participation was voluntary, their responses would remain confidential and only group results would be reported. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the experimenter gave participants an information sheet that explained the study.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Table 1 shows the comparisons between participants in the intrinsic and extrinsic reward structure program on demographic variables: age, length of time spent in an English-speaking country, length of time spent in Canada, amount of English schooling before coming to Canada and amount of the questionnaire understood. To control for inflated familywise error rates, a Bonferonni correction was applied. As shown, students in the extrinsic program were younger than were students in the intrinsic program. They also had spent more time in an English-speaking country and had higher levels of understanding of the questionnaire than students in the intrinsic program. To control for differences on these three variables, they were used as covariates in further analyses.

To determine whether the intrinsic and extrinsic reward structure groups differed on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, two one-way Analyses of Covariances (ANCOVAs) were conducted with age, length of time in English-speaking country and amount of the questionnaire understood as covariates. The intrinsic reward structure group ($M = 3.98$) did not differ from the extrinsic reward structure group ($M = 3.63$) on levels of extrinsic motivation, $F(1,57) = 2.30$,

$p = .14$. Similarly, the intrinsic reward structure group ($M = 4.54$) did not differ from the extrinsic reward structure group ($M = 4.31$) on levels of intrinsic motivation $F(1,57) = .97, p = .33$.

Group differences for levels of identification with the host and native culture were also evaluated with ANCOVAs. The intrinsic ($M = 4.18$) and extrinsic ($M = 3.84$) reward structure groups did not differ in their levels of identification with Canada, $F(1,57) = 2.51, p = .12$. They did differ, however, in their level of identification with their native cultures, $F(1,57) = 9.16, p = .004$. The extrinsic reward structure group was more identified with their own native culture ($M = 4.96$) than were the intrinsic reward structure group ($M = 4.24$).

Main analyses

To test whether acculturation would be best facilitated by congruence between goals and motives, for each reward group, we examined whether the correlations between acculturation and intrinsic motivation and acculturation and extrinsic motivation were significantly different from each other using a Hotelling/Williams t -test for dependent correlations (Williams, 1959; Steiger, 1980). This test compares two or more elements of a correlation matrix while taking the relatedness of a participant's response into account. Based on preliminary analyses, age, length of time living in an English-speaking country and level of understanding served as covariates in each analysis by adjusting the degrees of freedom and evaluating partial correlation values.

Consistent with our prediction, for the intrinsic reward structure group, the relationship between intrinsic motivation and acculturation to Canada ($r = .48$) was significantly greater than the relationship between extrinsic motivation and acculturation to Canada, ($r = .08$), $t(34) = 2.02, p < .05$, one-tailed. In contrast, for the extrinsic reward group, the relationship between acculturation to Canada was stronger for extrinsic motivation ($r = .73$) than intrinsic motivation ($r = .41$), $t(18) = -1.78, p < .05$, one-tailed.

As expected, for the intrinsic reward structure group there were no significant differences in the strength of the relationships between extrinsic ($r = -0.21$) or intrinsic motivation ($r = -0.18$) and acculturation to the heritage culture, $t < 1$. As well, there were no significant differences in the strength of the relationships between extrinsic ($r = -0.24$) or intrinsic motivation ($r = -0.11$) and acculturation to the heritage culture for the extrinsic reward structure group, $t < 1$.

Discussion

The main goal of this research was to examine whether individuals would be more acculturated when their motives were congruent or incongruent with their ESL learning goals. In line with previous research that found positive

outcomes when motives were congruent with goals (Brunstein *et al.*, 1998; Hofer and Chasiotis, 2003), this research suggests that acculturation to a new culture is facilitated by consistency between motives and goals. Specifically, we found that among students with extrinsic goals for learning English, the relationship between extrinsic motivation and acculturation was greater than that of intrinsic motivation and acculturation to the mainstream culture. In contrast, among students with intrinsic goals for learning English, the relationship between intrinsic motivation and acculturation was greater than that of extrinsic motivation and acculturation to the mainstream culture.

Interestingly, the correlation between intrinsic motivation and acculturation to the mainstream was moderately high for both groups. This finding is consistent with those of other researchers (Ramage, 1990; Ehrman, 1996; Noels, Clément and Pelletier, 2001), who have found links between intrinsic motivation and positive outcomes. This result suggests that intrinsic motivation may be an important predictor (or outcome) of acculturation to the host society for both groups. However, the influence of extrinsic motivation may be more relevant, relative to intrinsic motivation, when students' goals are extrinsically oriented.

Limitations

Of methodological interest, in past research, goal content has generally been assessed by asking participants to imagine or rate the desirability of particular goals (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996). In contrast, we operationalized goals based on the program ESL students were attending. This acknowledges the impact the learning context can have on learners' goals (Noels, 2001b). Further, this method has the advantage of examining goals that students are actively pursuing, which may offer greater external validity. That is, the relevance of an actively pursued goal may be greater than that of a desired goal. In particular, actively pursued goals associated with the commitment to live abroad in order to improve L2 skills would likely carry greater importance than desired goals obtained through experimental inquiries. At the same time, this methodology may raise questions of internal validity. Specifically, without manipulating goal content or conducting a manipulation check, we are limited in the degree to which we can infer the intrinsic or extrinsic nature of the goal aspiration.

Future research

Our results were limited to a small sample of East Asian students. In future research, it will be important to look at the relationship between motivational factors and acculturation among different cultures and with larger sample sizes. Additionally, the socioeconomic status of the participants may influence the generalizability of the findings. Travelling and studying abroad

is quite expensive; therefore, ESL students may be from higher socioeconomic statuses. As a result, the participants in this study may not be representative of the variation within their cultures. Also, while there is evidence that the self-determination continuum is relevant cross-culturally (Hayamizu, 1997; Chirkov, Ryan, Kim and Kaplan, 2003), more research is required to ensure its universal generalizability (Iyengar and Lepper, 1999).

Another interesting opportunity for future research would be to explore how individuals' motivations to learn English relate to acculturation over the long term. According to Noels *et al.* (2000), when students' motivations for learning an L2 are more internalized, they are more comfortable and persevering with the language learning process (see also Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens and Matos, 2005 for a similar argument with regards to adolescents' academic achievement). This suggests that, despite congruence, acculturation may be hindered by extrinsic motives and goals over the long term. Therefore, research exploring the long-term effects of motivation on acculturation may further qualify how the relationship between motivation and acculturation varies as a result of individuals' goals.

Finally, the present study pertained specifically to sojourning students from East Asian countries. To examine the generalizability of these results, future research could examine L2 learning among those making long-term relocations (e.g., migration) and L2 learning taking place in one's country of origin.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine how motives and goals work together to impact acculturation among L2 learners. Our findings support the proposition that despite strong support for self-regulated motives and basic need-fulfilling goals (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996), acculturation to the host culture was best facilitated by congruence among both intrinsic and extrinsic goals and motives. Similarly, other research has found that among sojourners, mental health is related to the degree to which pre-sojourning expectations match sojourning experiences (Weissman and Furnham, 1987; see also Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Taken together, both lines of research suggest that adaptation is best supported by ensuring consistency between initial expectations, current motivation and long term goals. Future research examining how to best achieve this consistency is necessary. For example, language learning programs that assist in developing realistic language learning expectations while reinforcing the congruence between students' motivation for learning an L2 and long-term goals may assist in fostering adaptive outcomes.

Findings that emphasize the importance of congruence between motivation and personal goals imply that striving to instill self-determined motives

among ESL students may counter their long-term goals and, therefore, may not be helpful to the acculturation process. For example, if a student is learning English in order to have better job opportunities upon returning to his or her home country, emphasis on the intrinsic reward of stimulation resulting from learning an L2 may be irrelevant to the learner's adjustment. Our results suggest that it may be more relevant, for example, to support the student's extrinsic motivation by pointing out how the language-learning program is relevant to the skills required for improving job opportunities. This assertion echoes the practical considerations discussed by Schmidt, Boraie and Kassabgy (1996, p. 10):

The topic of motivation is of practical interest to language program designers and administrators, who want to attract students to programs that will motivate them to learn by being congruent with their needs and interests [and to] teachers, who would like to use pedagogical techniques that reinforce and develop student motivation . . .

Put simply, the more reasons individuals have to perform their current activities that are consistent with their long term goals, the more adjusted they will feel in their environment.

Notes

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¹ Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed a third motivation, amotivation, which refers to situations where individuals do not have any motivations behind their actions. It is not included in this paper as this construct has proven difficult to measure (Noels *et al.*, 2000).

² The Language Learning Orientations Scale is comprised of subtests, which allow for an investigation of extrinsic motives that vary in their degree of internalization (e.g., external regulation, introjected regulation and identified regulation). Due to the small sample size obtained, an examination of these subtests would not be feasible in the current sample.

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