Original Research Article

The Psychology of a Language Learner: The Out-turn of Self-motivation on a Learner's Linguistic Self-competence

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	People always quote, "We are all the same." Is this really the case? For us human beings, are we really the same with no slight difference? When we say "same", it is about the way we communicate, our etiquette, our lifestyle, and our emotions as well. This quote is just flawed in a specific perspective, especially when we examine our way of learning language and how we get motivated and most importantly, motivate ourselves; we are the opposite of the same! For this purpose, it becomes a major essentiality to inspect or investigate the theoretical anatomy of "motivation" in second language acquisition and learning. This paper offers to throw light on the essence of motivation and mainly „self-motivation" as a catalyst to reach linguistic self- confidence and therefore self-competence in linguistic communication. This quantitative research scenario examined the contribution of Egyptian EFL learners" motivation, self- motivation, and linguistic self-confidence in their proficiency, as well as language-use anxiety to their willingness to communicate (WTC) level, along with a minor possible impact of age and gender on the learners" reported L2 WTC. 50 university students – 25 freshman students vs. 25 graduating senior students – were randomly selected to fill in a questionnaire for this study. Results indicated that L2 self-motivation and self-confidence made a remarkable contribution to the prediction of L2 WTC. Furthermore, it was found that the learners" age and gender did not make a statistical difference to their WTC, since the learners were freshmen vs. graduating seniors. The findings could contribute to the ongoing debates on the theory and practice of WTC and feed into further research that is germane to second language pedagogy and learners" self-motivation to be willing to communicate in their second language.

Introduction

In the world of language learning and the theoretical framework of the learner's psychology, motivation has been called the *"neglected heart"* of language teaching. As professors and instructors, we often forget that all of our learning activities are filtered through our students" motivation –both extrinsic and intrinsic. In this sense,

learners are in control of the flow of information and knowledge that is received in the educational setting or context, be it in the classroom or on their own. Without learning motivation, there is no pulse; there is no life in the learner's journey in reaching linguistic self-confidence to be willing to communicate with others in the second language being learned. When we learn to incorporate direct approaches to enkindling learners" motivation in language teaching, it will inspire both professors and learners at one time. The issue of motivation, particularly in EFL settings, is of paramount importance that additional examinations and analysis about teaching methodology seem to pale in comparison. It is significant to think about motivation as the essence of language teaching because of the unequivocal realities of learning English as a foreign or second language for most of the learners. Theoretically speaking, it is simple and plain sailing to view why motivation is of great importance in second language acquisition (SLA): it provides the fundamental momentum to initiate L2 learning and is later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved in SLA entail motivation to some extent. Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to guarantee learners" understanding and achievement. Delving more into the motivational theories, the very primary impetus in L2 motivation research originated from social psychologists Wallace Lambert, Robert Gardner, and their associates. Since making use of the second language or target language (TL) is deemed to be the emblem or representation to learners" learning success, the concept of "self-motivation" began to emerge in the motivational approaches. Self- motivation, obviously, relates to the learner's very own unique way of creating an intrinsic motivation or desire to achieve the needed linguistic competence. It is the ability to do what needs to be done, *without* any influence from other people or situations. Self-motivated learners can find a reason and strength to complete a task –sometimes called „task motivation"- even when it challenging and effort-laden, without giving up or needing another to encourage them. Needless to state, self-motivation highly differs from one learner to another. High self- motivation yields high self-esteem and passion for the ideal linguistic performance when it comes to interacting with speakers of the second language, and therefore success. Intrinsic motivators are driven by internal rewards, such as a feeling of achievement or sense of well- being or pride in taking over the burden of the learning challenge, unlike extrinsic motivators who are driven by external rewards, such as money or fame. Results indicated that there is a multitude of ways to boost self-motivation when it comes to second language learning. In particular, this study has the objective of answering the following questions:

    a.   What are the most common ways to enhance self-motivation in second language learning ?
    b.   To what extent does self-motivation outweigh extrinsic motivation in second language learning?

Literature Review

To nurture a sense of inquisitiveness within a learner and to help see them as an involved, confident partaker in the process of language communication, there are some landmark works in the erstwhile literature that have focused on the research topic this paper tackles. Drawing upon and paralleling the previous motivational approaches to language at the time, Gardner and Lambert (1972) viewed second languages as mediating factors between diverse ethno linguistic communities and therefore regarded the motivation to learn the language of the other community as a primary force responsible for enhancing or hindering intercultural communication and affiliation. These researchers adopted a social psychological approach that was based on the main tenet that "students" attitudes toward the specific language group are bound to influence how successful they will be in incorporating aspects of that language" (Gardner, 1985). According to Ellis (2008), linguistic interaction may be defined as the discussion jointly constructed by the pupil learner and his or her peers. This view of learning sees it as a result of interaction between the learners" cognitive abilities and the linguistic environments (Long, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Swain, 1995) propose that interaction is necessary for second language learning. According to the linguists mentioned above, three aspects of verbal interaction can be distinguished: input, production (output) and feedback. Input is the language offered to the learner by native speakers or other learners, production is the

language spoken by the language learners themselves and the response or feedback given by the instructor or professor enhances the learners" linguistic self-confidence and thus higher linguistic self-competence. Swain (1995) states that output forces the learner to process language on a deeper level and that the output serves in three functions: noticing, hypothesis-testing and conscious reflection. Delving more into the theoretical framework, noticing involves raising the learner's awareness of their own gap the second language and then a cognitive process starts in their minds regarding the target language. Hypothesis-testing function is when pupils use their output to try out "new language forms and structures as they stretch their interlanguage to meet communicative needs; they may output just to see what works and what does not" (Swain, 1995:132). Conscious reflection talks about when pupils produce output and thereafter reflect upon it. Swain's aspects are all important and worth noticing, and due to the basic question of research used in this paper, these aspects are only noteworthy to state the importance of self-motivation to interact confidently and competently. Going on with the literature, a question was formulated regarding WTC: what do we mean when we talk of willingness to communicate? For MacIntyre et al. (1998) communication "has a wide meaning encompassing for example, reading L2 newspapers, watching L2 television, or utilizing an L2 in the classroom. MacIntyre et al. (1998) defines willingness to communicate as "the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so". The term motivation is also used for explaining why the pupil did or did not gain knowledge; without the need to go into detail about what factors have contributed to their commitment, the teacher can simply say "Because they are motivated" or "They are not motivated" (Dörnyei, 2001:6). According to Dörnyei (2001), by using the word motivation, theoreticians and researchers can more easily relate to the most basic aspects of our mind in areas such as our wills, desires, rational thinking and feelings. However, motivation is a chief aspect to be considered when learning a second language as it can determine success or failure in any learning situation (Van Lier, 1996). According to Gardner (1985) cited in Dörnyei (2001) motivation is a "mental engine that subsumes effort, want / will and task enjoyment". Motivation is tackled from standpoints such as language level, learner's level and learning situation level.

Notwithstanding, in this research, in order to investigate learners" self-motivation, motivation will be inspected from one of Dörynei"s perspectives, the language level. In the related literature, linguistic self-confidence in one's proficiency, also referred to as perceived communication competence or L2 self-confidence, as well as L2 anxiety, also known as communication apprehension, communication anxiety, or language-use anxiety, are reported to be directly related to WTC (Clément et al., 2003; MacIntyre, 1994; Yashima, 2002, qtd in Ghanbarpour). Additionally, Peng (2007) moved one step further by setting forth that communication apprehension and self-perceived competence are "the most immediate antecedents of L2 WTC" (p. 34). Linguistic self-confidence is defined in terms of self-perception of second language competence and a low level of anxiety (Clement, 1986 cited in MacIntyre et. al., 1998:549). Looking at different research brings forward a considerable variation in regards to how anxiety studies have been integrated into various researches. There is no doubt that anxiety affects L2 performance, as cited in Dörnyei (2005) it is concluded that "anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process". It is clear that motivation is a highly complex phenomenon consisting of a number of variables. Motivation is of crucial importance in the learning experience, whether learners arrive with it or whether they acquire it through educational setting or classroom experiences. It is worth examining to what extent learners engage with others to see if this reveals their motivation in the process of communication. To express the connection between the theoretical perspectives, this paper attempts to explain what significance learners" self-motivation has on their linguistic self- confidence.

Methodology

Participants of the present study were comprised of 50 university students (25 freshman students and 25 graduating senior students) within the 18-23 age range. Most of the partaking students were doing their studies at Misr International University (MIU). They were all studying on undergraduate BA and BSc levels and were all attending general English courses as one of the requirements of their final graduation. During data collection,

having a certain level of English mastery was among the mandatory qualifications to take any of the programs offered on campus. The participants of this research filled in a questionnaire which consisted of 10 questions on a Likert scale where number 1 is the lowest and number 7 is the highest, along with three open- ended questions to understand more about the participants" motivation. Using both quantitative questions and a more of qualitative questions serves a lot to aid in reaching the most accurate and valid findings. The questionnaire is found in the Appendix section at the very end of this research. A couple of questions were piloted first among 10 students (5 freshman students and 5 graduating senior students) before going through with the entire questionnaire, and luckily, they loved the idea of being self-motivated and wanted to continue with the rest of the questions. A one-time questionnaire was administered at the end of a class session. It took the participants about 20 minutes to fill out the questionnaire, and it was made clear that their participation in the study would not influence their final evaluation, and the questionnaire would be treated anonymously. Accordingly, it was optional to write their names.

Discussion

Inspecting whether or not the correlation between the learners" linguistic self-confidence in their proficiency and WTC was significant, the participants were asked to state their feelings and give a brief feedback orally to the researcher. This is just a minor procedure to ensure that none of the participants was under the impression of fear or any kind of influence. After conducting the questionnaire and reviewing all the answers and choices done by the participants, it was beyond clear that the hypothesis is defended. The researcher found that most of the participants prefer to motivate themselves by creating a motivational atmosphere to follow their dreams, wills, and desires that related to going through the hassle of their diverse majors. Most of the results have indicated that fear is essential when it comes to increasing the linguistic self-competence; however, taking over such fear by visualizing the end result of reaching where they want to be. Some findings indicated the need for extrinsic motivation and the need for a challenging environment first to motivate the self; surprisingly enough, that was not the case for most of the selected participants. To synopsize the results of this study so far, „self-motivation" shows the signs of feeling good about oneself when others do not necessarily influence the learner or even understand why there could be a reason to be motivated. Replying to the first research question the paper poses, there is a wealth of methods to create a motivational setting or motivate your own environment to reach the highest academic achievement. The need to organize the possible motivational strategies arose, this is by choosing not to avoid being daunting and encouraging oneself to feel how complex the domain is and still believe in achieving despite all the burdening challenges and all the odds that might, and will, come in the way. The final framework the researcher could explain based on the results consists of four main dimensions: 1. creating the basic motivational conditions for oneself, 2. generating initial motivation, 3. maintaining and protecting motivation, 4. encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. Even though a myriad of people might deem the psychological attitude in assessing one's linguistic self- confidence and therefore self-competent nonsense, it is proven here to be true and in fact, creative. To create your own atmosphere to aim higher is the ultimate ingredient to second language learning success that will eventually let the learner reach their ideal linguistic self.

Conclusion

As a résumé, the concept of „self-motivation" in determining the second language linguistic self- confidence is here to illuminate how second language learners come to master the L2, including how they are socialized to use language appropriately in culturally significant activities, and how they are socialized through language into local values, beliefs, theories, and conceptions of the L1; how the processes of linguistic and cultural development are interlinked and that is when the L2 ideal linguistic self is fulfilled. A multitude of conclusions can be drawn from the results of the present study, which could enjoy the interest of further researchers and experts\ in SLA as well as EFL/ESL professors or instructors. In light of the results of the present study, „self- motivation" contributes to a huge extent in the learners" linguistic self-confidence in proficiency and language-use anxiety made

significantly different contributions to L2 WTC. On a similar vein of research, further studies could look into the whys and hows that explain the reasons second language learners might be a motivated or demotivated to even encourage themselves. That would be an interesting area to research and fill the gap in the literature of motivation in SLA. Moreover, comparing learners" WTC in L2 is a way to give space for new research studies to flesh out and come to life. Adopting a qualitative approach to „self-motivation" and WTC, further studies could investigate other factors influencing learners" WTC and linguistic self- competence to prepare the ideal linguistic selves to emerge later on.

References

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Appendix

THE OUT-TURN OF 'SELF-MOTIVATION' ON A LEARNER'S LINGUISTIC SELF-COMPETENCE

A.   Read each question carefully and choose the number that best describes you. There are no right and wrong answers, simply choose 1, if the sentence does not describe you at all; 7, if the sentence strongly describes you. If you describe yourself as somewhere in the middle, please rate yourself accordingly.

		Strongly Disagree			Neither		Strongly Agree	
	Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I want to learn everything I need to learn.							
2	No matter how much I like or dislike a class, I still try to learn from it.							
3	I sign up for the same classes that my friends sign up for.							
4	I feel that challenging assignments can be great learning experiences.							
5	I prefer difficult tasks as opposed to moderate tasks.							
6	I feel good about myself when others do not understand material that is clear to me.							

7	I never boast about my grades.							
8	I do all that I can to make my assignments turn out perfectly.							
9	I sign up for the classes that will prepare me for the future.							
10	I would only sign up for a club if it helped me to reach a long-term goal.							

A. *Answer the following questions elaborately.*

How would you assess your own English oral competence and do you feel you have the needed competence to interact on a given topic? Do you feel comfortable speaking in front of the whole class?

Do you think your classmates help you in developing your English competence? To what extent do you think „self-motivation" is significant when it comes to learning English?