

**INTEGRATIVE MOTIVATION: HOW PERCEPTIONS
OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE COUNTRY
INFLUENCE STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONAL PATTERN**

A Paper Presented at the Science and Art of Language In Teaching International Conference

Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

20 November 2006

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Abstract

Motivation has been recognized by both psychologists and educators as one of the key elements for a successful learning outcome. In research on motivation in language learning, it is customary to view the construct as a dyadic unity of integrative and instrumental motivation. The former includes the learners' attitudes towards the culture and native speakers of the target language. This research aims to explore whether integrative motivation is ubiquitous in the foreign language classroom. For this purpose, context analysis of the open-ended questionnaires was carried out to examine perceptions that students learning Russian at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) have about Russia, its culture and people. As the results revealed, initially, only scant traces of integrative motivation were detected. However, in the course of the language program, "integrative" drive intensified. The paper proceeds to discuss whether and how pedagogical intervention might alter the learners' motivational pattern.

Introduction

Motivation has been a major research topic in psychology. Studies on motivation in psychology have sought to determine "what moved a resting organism to a state of activity" (Weiner, 1990, p.617). Numerous theories and concepts have been put forward by psychologists to describe human motivation. It also has been recognized that motivation is an important agent in the cognitive process. As Weiner (1990, p.618) noted, "Motivation is often inferred from learning, and learning usually is an indicator of motivation for the educational psychologist".

It is customary to divide the construct of motivation into the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), motivation is considered extrinsic when its source is a person's outward environment. Within the learning context, students' desire to get peers' respect, teachers' or parents' praise, high grades or admission to a university belongs in the domain of extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation occurs when people do activity "for its own sake" when no external pressure is applied or promise of reward is offered (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

In the context of language learning motivation has been connected to learners' attitudes towards the culture and speakers of the language they learn, or the target language. This approach to viewing motivation has been widely adopted since Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced their socio-educational model of motivation and began distinguishing between instrumental and

integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation prompts learners to strive to achieve some utilitarian goals, such as getting good grades, passing an examination, securing admittance to university, etc. Integrative motivation comes into play when language learners have positive attitudes towards and are interested in the country, culture or people of the language they are learning. Gardner and Lambert put stress on the importance of integrative motivation for a successful acquisition of a second language.

2. Integrative and Instrumental Motivation in Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Learning

Initially, language learner's desire to be affiliated with the speakers of the target language featured prominently in Gardner's model, and his original premise had been whether "someone could really learn a second language if they did not like the group who spoke the language" (Gardner, 2001).

Gardner has gradually modified his assumption of the importance of the positive attitude towards the target language speaking community, and shifted stress to a favourable attitude towards "learning the language" itself. Thus, Gardner (1985) defined motivation as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitude toward learning the language" (p.10). Still, in this Gardner's view of motivation learner's attitude remains an important variable in the construct.

Gardner's notions of motivation in language learning, i.e. separation of the construct into integrative and instrumental motivation and the stress on the importance of cultural integration for a good learning outcome have had a major impact on research on motivation in SLA despite the criticisms by the researchers who maintained that the degree of integrative motivation could not be considered as a predictor of success in SLA (Lukmani 1972, Genesee 1978).

In the context of foreign language learning (FLL) the relevance of integrative motivation and learner's attitude toward the group of target language speakers have been questioned as well.

For example, a study by Olshtain *et al.* (1990) that adopted an instrumental-integrative scale of motivation found out that affective variables, such as attitudes, did not feature prominently in the students' achievement in FLL. This prompted Nikolov (1999, p. 33) to remark, "It is important to find out if integrative motivation is limited to bilingual and bicultural contexts and what role instrumental motivation plays". This is a valid remark since the presence of integrative motivation presupposes that learners are familiar with the country and culture of the language they learn or have had some encounters with the native speakers of that language. This might not be always the case as people may be learning the language of a *terra incognita* both in the geographical and cultural sense, the language where considerable social, cultural, or psychological distances are involved.

Expanding the original model of motivation as proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Gardner and McIntyre (1992) distinguished the following four parameters in the construct: the socio-cultural milieu, individual differences, language acquisition context, and language learning outcome. McIntyre (2002, p.48) further suggested that the integrative motive be divided into integrativeness and motivation whereby "integrativeness ... begins with the cultural beliefs present in the socio-cultural milieu". He elaborates that "the socio-cultural milieu ... fosters attitudes within the learning situation that are embodied, at least in part, by the teacher as a representative of the target language group" (McIntyre 2002, p. 48). This approach allows focusing on the issue of cultural beliefs and perceptions that language learners bring into the classroom and how those influence the learners' motivational pattern. Also, it gives recognition to the fact that learning situation has a good potential to alter those beliefs and perceptions.

This research will adopt the framework suggested by McIntyre (2002) with the aim to determine the role of integrative motivation in the context of foreign language leaning (FLL), the Russian language specifically. It will explore the students' motivation from two angles. First, it will look at cultural beliefs about and the perceptions of Russia held by the Russian language students at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Then it will seek to determine what motivates the students in their language study. The questions of significance are: What place does the integrative

motivation occupy in the students' learning agendas? Is integrative motivation ubiquitous in the foreign language classroom? Does the integrative drive intensify over the duration of the language program? This study employed "free-format" open-ended questionnaires that would allow hearing the students' "voices".

3. Present Research

Participants

Participants in this research were 74 first year students who were learning Russian at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in the academic year 2004/2005. Regarding the demographic profile, there were considerably more female ($n=48$, or 64.9%) than male ($n=26$, or 35.1%) students. Students came from various ethnic backgrounds, *eg.*, Malays, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan, Dusun, Iban, Bajau, Sino-Kadazan. The majority of the participants were science students ($n=53$, or 71.6%).

Procedure

Two different opened-ended questionnaire surveys were conducted. The first survey was implemented in June 2004, in the beginning of the very first Russian language class for this cohort of students. The students were asked to write what images the words "Russia" or "Russian" conjured in their minds. The answers were solicited on an anonymous basis and the respondents were free to give any number of responses. This part of the research aimed to investigate what knowledge, conceptions and opinions about Russia the students brought into the classroom. Also, it aimed to explore their attitudes towards Russian people and culture, all of which form an important part of the integrative component of the motivation construct. Seventy four students replied these questions yielding a total of 193 answers.

The second survey involved the same cohort of students, and took place in March 2005, when the respondents were finishing their second semester of the Russian language program. The open-ended questionnaires soliciting answers to the questions “What motivates you to learn Russian?” and “What encourages your to learn Russian?” were distributed. These questionnaires aimed to look into the nature of the learners’ motivation. Seventy four students answered the questionnaires providing 198 statements.

The context analysis was then carried out to analyse the questionnaires. The qualitative analysis software N6 formerly known as NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) was used for this purpose.

4. Results

a) Results from the First Survey: Students’ knowledge about Russia and their attitudes towards the target language country, culture and people.

A total of 193 answers were collected in this part of enquiry (see Table 1).

Cluster	Number of answers	Percentage
Russian language, people and culture	54	28%
Geography and country image	51	27%
History, politics, ideology	41	21%
Education and technology	20	10%
Lack of any knowledge	9	5%
Others	18	9%
Total	193	100%

Table 1: Students’ knowledge about Russia

The majority of answers (total 54) related to the learners' attitude towards Russian culture, language and its speakers. First of all, thirty-three comments related to the Russian language; they were mostly of a general nature. Nine answers were concerned with the novelty and uniqueness of the Russian language for the learners (eg., "it's a new language for me", "it's a unique language", "unique spelling which looks like Greek"). Seven remarks alluded to the perceived difficulty of Russian (eg., "I heard that this language is very difficult to learn", "it must be difficult to pronounce"). Many answers were less specific (eg., "it's a foreign language", "Russia has its own language"), while one student candidly answered, "First I thought the Russian and German (languages) are same but I am wrong". There are some integrative inclinations in this cluster of answers most typical being "I like the way Russians speak", "it's a good language to learn because it comes from an interesting country", "I think it's a beautiful language", "Russian is a pretty good language to learn".

Secondly, twenty-one comments within this cluster were on Russian people (14 answers) and culture (7 answers). It should be noted that this is rather a small share in the total of 193 answers, especially given the fact that the respondents were free to write as many answers as they wished. This scarcity of opinion is most probably due to a fact that the students have had no occasions for direct encounters with the Russians. Overall, the comments regarding Russian people were either neutral ("they are white people") or positive ("people are nice and warm", "they are good looking", "Russians are hard-working"). One person divulged, "It is the first time that I see a Russian" (i.e., the instructor). However, only two responses in this cluster could be viewed within the integrative motivation framework ("I would be proud to communicate with the Russian people", "Maybe, some day I can communicate with the saints there"). Thirdly, remarks on Russian culture were less specific (i.e., "I know Russian culture by watching the TV", "unique culture", "historical (*sic*) culture"), and no traces of integrative motivation were detected.

The second largest cluster of replies (total 51) was related to Russia's geography (28 responses) and the country image (13 statements). Most typical answers were of a general nature, eg.,

“Russia is a cold country”, “the weather is cool”, “it’s a big country”. Names of cities and areas, such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, the Ural mountains were also mentioned. Some erroneous beliefs were in evidence, eg., “Russia consists of Ukraine, Romania, and Crimea”. In this part, not unexpectedly, the overwhelming majority of answers were neutral. Overall, only a very general knowledge of Russia transpired. Regarding the country image, some responses could be construed as positive (eg., “(Russia is) one of the biggest powers in the world”, “great country”) while others tended to be rather negative (eg., “people are not wealthy”, “(Russia) has ethnic problems”). Only two responses in this cluster could be classified as indicating the presence of the integrative motivation, i.e., “I think it’s a nice country”, “I want to go to Russia”.

The next cluster of forty-one answers could be classified under the “History, politics, ideology” heading. Most typical answers (18) related to Russian history and its communist past (eg., “Russia was a communist country before”, “it’s a communist country” (*sic*), “the former nation of the USSR”, “the Cold War”). Among the historical personae, Karl Marx (who, in fact, was a German) was mentioned three times while Lenin and Tsar Peter the Great were mentioned twice each. On the positive side, some respondents stated that Russia is “a veto power holder in the United Nations” showing knowledge of the country’s international status. One upbeat answer given was that “Putin is a cool guy”.

Further, twenty answers were related to education and technology. Twelve students mentioned medical and pharmacy courses in Russia which are popular in Malaysia (eg., “Russia has many medical schools”, “many Malaysian students study there”, “medical program recognized in our country”). Regarding the technology, such statements as “aerospace technology”, “great inventions”, “high tech”, “jet planes” were also offered.

Nine responses professed a lack of any knowledge of Russia (eg., “I don’t know anything that’s why I am here”). Finally, eighteen answers were classified as “others” since they did not form a unified cluster of opinions and either dealt with emotions (eg., “exciting and fun”, “never expected

to learn Russian”) and intentions (eg., “I hope to learn it happily”) or were cryptic and difficult to decipher (eg., “words of greetings”, “alloha”).

Overall, the students’ responses indicated that integrative motivation was not on their learning agendas, and only some answers could be construed as having the integrative inclinations towards the target language culture.

b) Results from the Second Survey: Students’ Motivation for Language Learning

Total 198 answers to the questions “What motivates you to learn Russian?” and “What encourages your to learn Russian?” were obtained in this part of the enquiry (see Table 2). Forty nine answers revealed that the students were motivated to learn the Russian language to widen their general knowledge (eg., “to get a lot of knowledge”, “to learn new things”, “more knowledge gained”) and increase their knowledge of languages (eg., “I want to learn a new language”, “interest in foreign language learning”, “I like studying languages”, “knowing more languages is better”). In this cluster of answers, a strong propensity for knowledge acquisition is evident. However, no traces of integrative motivation to learn Russian have transpired.

Source of motivation	Number of answers	Percentage
Knowledge acquisition	49	25%
Russia-inspired	33	17%
Friends/family	25	13%
Interesting/unique experience	23	12%
Classroom context	19	10%
Perceived usefulness	17	8%
Graduation requirement	15	7%
Others	17	8%
Total	198	100%

Table 2: Reported sources of motivation

The second most important source of motivation cited by the students could be described as “Russia-inspired” (33 answers). This is a significant fact since the answers in this cluster indicated a strong indication of the learners’ interest in the Russian language, culture and their desire to get a deeper knowledge of the country and language. Among the various statements in this section, such answers as “I wish to know more about Russian culture”, “I want to know about Russia”, “Russia has its own beautiful language” were the most common.

Next, friends and family were cited as a source of motivation (25 answers). Interestingly enough, 11 answers, or almost half of responses in this cluster, indicated that *Malaysian* friends who studied medicine in Russia motivated the learners to succeed in their language studies (eg., “I want to be able to communicate with friends who study in Russia when they come back”, “communicate with my friend who studies in Russia through SMS”, “special friend studies in Russia”). This was quite an unexpected moment in this enquiry since, more commonly, when people learn a language for the purpose of communication they focus on the native speakers of the target language. In this way learners of a foreign language can become a part of the foreign language culture and community, which is a very important element in Gardner’s concept of integrative motivation. In this case study, however, the learners expressed a desire to use the foreign language when speaking with their *compatriots* which points out that not integrativeness towards native speakers but rather a desire to be affiliated with a certain group of people was the driving force for a number of students.

Twenty three respondents stated that learning Russian was a valuable, unique and interesting experience (eg., “learning Russian is something special”, “it’s unique and new”, “I may never have a chance to learn it outside (the campus)”). Again, though the learners expressed their appreciation of being able have a new experience and get an exposure to a foreign culture, the answers do not allow talking of the presence of integrative motivation.

“Classroom context” could be a suitable description for the next cluster of answers on the source of motivation. Among the 19 answers in this section the most frequent were “interesting class activities”, “I want to know more to participate in the classroom activities”, “the way lecturer teaches”. No integrative motivation is evident in this cluster. Similarly, the answers that are grouped together under the headings “perceived usefulness” (17 responses) and “graduation requirement” (15 responses) cannot by their nature belong in the domain of integrative motivation.

Finally, 17 respondents cited miscellaneous reasons for being motivated to learn Russian (*eg.*, “Russian is similar to English which is my favourite subject”, “I find it very interesting and challenging to master the language”, “to prove to others that I can do better”) or were too cryptic to be deciphered with a good degree of certainty as to their meaning (*eg.*, “multimedia”, “engineering”).

The most interesting finding of the second survey is perhaps that the motivational drive that could be described as “Russia-inspired” and that attested to the presence of the integrative motivation had intensified among the learners (17% of the total answers) during the language program.

Discussion

For the language instructor, a good knowledge of one’s students and their motivational patterns is very important when developing the course syllabus and planning the classroom activities. As Nikolov (1999, p.39) noted, “Actual motivations of students, in our observation, are infrequently employed for establishing the nature of classroom activities”. Knowing the students’ motivational inclinations may help the language instructors to make better informed choices regarding the course materials and the pedagogical procedure in the classroom.

As the responses in the first survey indicated, initially, there has been only a scant evidence of the presence of the integrative motivation in the students’ learning agendas. This could be attributed to the socio-cultural environment where the language learning was taking place. Both geographically and culturally Russia is a distant land to the learners in Malaysia. There is no

Russian language community in the country and not much information on Russia is provided by the major mass media. The results of the first survey lend some support to Nikolov's (1999) assumption that the integrative motivation could be limited to bilingual and bicultural contexts, such as learning French in Canada, and not necessarily be evident in a foreign language classroom. This finding also indicates that pedagogical intervention was needed to enhance the students' motivation.

For the cohort of students involved in this study, the incorporation of the socio-cultural element in the course synopsis proved to be especially relevant. Thus, in each lesson, the students were given short texts in English which introduced them to some aspects of Russian culture and history. Usually, the information was pertinent to the lesson's topic (i.e., Russian names, how to greet people in Russian, how to correctly address people, information about Russian society and culture, etc.). The Internet served as a main source for these short texts that were both informative and entertaining. Also, the learners were encouraged to explore Russian culture themselves; for example, through preparing and presenting group reports (in English) on culture, history, people, or every-day life in Russia. The marks for these reports were made a part of the course evaluation.

The results of the second survey testified that after two semesters of the language study there had occurred a shift in attitudes among the learners. Apparently, the students acquired a more positive attitude towards the target language's country and its culture. In 33 responses, a desire to know more about Russia and its culture was mentioned as a source of motivation to learn the language.

The differences in results between the first and second surveys imply that the language learning context has a good potential for developing and enhancing the learners' motivation. As the results of this study indicate, integrativeness did significantly intensify among the learners in the course of the language program. Numerous options are available for stimulating the students' interest toward learning a foreign language. Incorporating the socio-cultural elements of the course synopsis and linking those with vocabulary learning could be an interesting addition to the

classroom activities. For example, when preparing their reports on Russian culture the students were asked to include in their presentation a relevant for the topic new vocabulary and introduce it to their classmates. Moreover, the learners' could also be asked to act as "language instructors" and design some exercises or think of other ways to present the new vocabulary to their classmates. In this way, a wider classroom context is created which allows the students' deeper involvement in the teaching-learning process and thus has a good potential to stimulate the learners' motivation. Introducing a greater amount of various authentic materials into the language classroom is also beneficial for promoting the learners' interest in the target language culture.

This study looked into the nature of motivation and attempted to determine the status of integrative motivation among the Russian language learners. Comparative studies on motivation and attitudes towards the target language country, culture and community among the students learning various foreign languages (eg., Russian, German, French, Japanese, Arabic, Mandarin, etc.) could shed additional light on motivational patterns of foreign language learners. Such a study could help establishing whether the integrative component of motivation is more prominent among the learners of the languages and cultures that are "close" in geographical or cultural sense to their own.

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