Research Paper

Investigation of EFL language learners' strategies and motivational orientations in an academic context

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between English Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) and motivational orientations including amotivation, extrinsic orientation and intrinsic orientation. To do so, 131 university students, studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), by use of cluster sampling were randomly selected. In order to assess English Language Learning Strategies and to estimate motivational orientation, “Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)” and “Language Learning Orientations Scale (LLOS)” were applied, respectively. Multiple regression displayed that there is a significantly negative relationship between scored obtained from LLSs and amotivation. Furthermore, while no significant relationship has been found between extrinsic orientation and LLSs; there was a significantly positive relationship between intrinsic orientation and scored obtained from LLSs. Thus, it has been noted that intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation affects LLSs.

Key words: Language learning strategies, motivational orientations, language learning orientations scale (LLOS), strategy inventory for language learning (SILL).

INTRODUCTION

There is a rich literature on motivational orientations in general psychology, which has not been fully exploited in EFL/ESL contexts. Much of the work in SLA research is that associated with Gardner, Lambert and their associates. Motivation, so measured, affects the extent to which individual learners preserve in learning a language, the kinds of learning behaviors they employ (for example, the level of participants in the classroom), and their actual achievement (Ellis, 1994).

Gardner and his colleagues found that integrative motivation, which refers to ‘a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other language group’ (Lambert, 1974, p.98), was a more powerful predictor of linguistic achievement as it was consistently correlated with L2 linguistic achievement. Instrumental integration, which refers to ‘the practical value and advantages of learning a new language’ (Lambert, 1974, p.98), was found to be related to L2 linguistic achievement in some studies. One area where instrumental motivation can prove to be successful is in the situation where the learner is provided with no opportunity to use the target language and therefore, no chance to interact with members of the target group. Lukmani (1972) found that an instrumental orientation was more important than an integrative orientation in non-westernized female learners of L2 English in Bombay. The social situation helps to determine both what kind of orientation learners have and what kind is most important for language learning. Therefore, one concern of this study is to investigate Iranian students’ motivational orientation to see in Iran as a country in which there is no chance to use target language or interact with native speakers is the instrumental orientation the dominant type of orientation? The strength of learners’ motivation can be expressed to have a casual effect in the quantity of language learning strategy they employ. Oxford and Nikos (1989), in a study of students of foreign languages in US universities, found that “the degree of expressed motivation was the single most powerful...
Influence on the choice of language learning strategies"
(p.42).

In O’Malley and Chamot’s framework (1990), three major
types of strategy including metacognitive, cognitive and
social are distinguished.

Another comprehensive classification of language
learning strategies is provided by Oxford. The classification
scheme she first came up with (Oxford, 1985) was used as a
basis for constructing a questionnaire on language learning
strategy. The Strategy Inventory for Language learning
(SILL) contained 64 individual; strategies was divided into
two main groups, primary strategies and support
strategies.

In Oxford (1990), a general distinction is drawn between
direct and indirect strategies. The former consists of
strategies that directly involve the target language in the
sense that they require mental processing of the language
(199:37), while the latter provide indirect support for
language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating,
seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing
cooperation, empathy and other means (1990:151).

A sample of definitions of language learning strategies,
taken from the recent literature is presented in Table 1
(Ellis, 1994: 531).

It should be noted here that, according to Ellis (1994), a
number of differences between the learning strategies used
by learners in a classroom as opposed to those used in a
more natural setting have been found. Studies of classroom
learners suggest that social strategies are rare. Chamot,
(1987), for instance, illustrated that their classroom
learners mentioned social and affective strategies
infrequently, the only exception being questioning for
clarification.

Moreover, Ellis added that there may also be differences
in strategy use according to whether the classroom setting
is a second or foreign language one. The EFL students
investigated by Chamot et al. (1987) claimed to use some
strategies not mentioned by ESL students in the study of
O’Malley et al. (1985) (for example, rehearsal, translation,
note-taking, substitution, and contextualization). The EFL
students also reported relying on cognitive strategies (in
relation to metacognitive and socio-affective strategies) to a
lesser extent than the ESL students (Ellis, 1994).

A number of research have revealed that miscellaneous
factors such as cultural setting, age, gender, and motivation
would affect selection and use of language learning
strategies (Oxford, 1990a). It is unlikely that motivational
orientation is much more affective than other factors
(Oxford et al., 1993). In fact, motivation could affect how
language learners utilize language strategies, how they
interact with native speakers, how much they acquire
target language, and eventually, how they perform on
language tests and learning foreign language skills (Oxford
and Shearin, 1994).

Furthermore, motivated language learners not only enjoy
language learning strategies but also their strategies are
flexible and diverse (Oxford, Nyikos, 1989).

In socio-educational models for language learning, language
learning motivation has been considered as an
intervening variable which include tendency to language
learning, motivation intensity and language learning
attitude (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994).

One of these models, recently presented, is Extrinsic –
Intrinsic motivation model put forwarded by Noels et al.
(2000). According to this model, motivational orientations
in learning a second or foreign language were divided into
three categories: amotivation, extrinsic motivation and
intrinsic motivation.

Amotivation indicates lack of purposefulness in
performing an activity (Ryan and Deci, 1985). In other
words, demotivated individuals have no value for the
activity (Ryan, 1995). In extrinsic motivation individual
performs an activity in order to get an external result (Ryan
and Deci, 2000a). This result might involve a reward,
punishment avoidance, freedom from consciousness, or even a feeling of self-satisfaction.

In internal motivation, individual performs an activity because of its inherent satisfaction within the activity (Amabile et al., 1994). This type of motivation emerges from the person or activity (Bateman and Crant, 2004). In fact, it is a natural tendency to explore, learn, develop abilities and search new and challenging phenomena (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).

Some studies have revealed that externally and internally motivated individuals have totally different approaches toward language tasks. While externally motivated students enjoy less from the tasks and focus more on the product of learning process and utilize surface data processing (Pintrich and DeGroot, 1990), internally motivated students involve in cognitive and metacognitive strategies and make attempts to comprehend the lessons. They also use self-regulated strategies in learning and persist to do the tasks (Pintrich and Degroot, 1990). Deci and Ryan (1985) considered internal value and learning motivation as fundamental factors in students’ use of cognitive and self-regulated strategies. In other words, internal value of school tasks plays a major role in students’ success. It must be noted here that it does not mean internal value of school task leads to high scores rather it helps students using more cognitive strategies (Pintrich and DeGroot, 1990).

A number of research on language learning show that internally motivated language learners tend to continue language learning (Noles, 2001) thus enhancing their feeling about the target language (Noels et al., 2000).

As it was mentioned earlier, understanding the relationship between motivational orientations and language learning strategies is of paramount importance. In fact, knowing this kind of relationship among language learners would bring about necessary motivations for using language learning strategies and thereby language learners would be independent of regulating their learning process and acquiring the deep structure of target language.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between motivational orientations and use of language learning strategies and also aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Would motivational orientation (amotivation, extrinsic and intrinsic) predict English Language Learning Strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social)?
2. In comparison, what type of orientation would have a significant contribution to predict English Language Learning Strategies?

**METHODOLOGY**

To investigate the relationship between motivational orientations (as predict variables) and language learning strategy (as independent variable), multiple regression was applied.

131 university students (Female=79, Male=52), studying English Language as a Foreign Language (EFL) at (X) University were selected. Their age ranged between 19-25 years; for the purpose of the present study both gender and age variables were excluded. By use of cluster sampling, 8 English classrooms were randomly selected. In order to assess motivational orientation, Language Learning Orientation Scale (LLOS) (Noels et al., 2000) was administered. This scale contains three subscales including orientation, extrinsic orientation and intrinsic orientation. Amotivation subscale itself is composed of 3 questions. For instance, “I don’t know why I should learn English Language”, or “I can’t catch what I’m doing during studying English.”

Extrinsic orientation subscale has 9 questions. For example, “I am learning English language to be successful in my future carrier.”

Intrinsic orientation subscale has 9 questions as well. For instance, “I am learning English since I would be internally delighted whenever I find out new things.”

Generally, LLOS consists of 21 questions in which each question has 1-to-5 degree options. Total score obtained from each subscale indicated the type of orientation for the individual. In order to estimate reliability of such scale, t-test method was used. That is, 34 participants took the exam twice within one month. Reliability indices for amotivation, intrinsic and extrinsic orientation were 0.70, 0.78 and 0.79; cronbach coefficients were 0.86, 0.82 and 0.78, respectively.

**FINDINGS**

Multiple regression results between motivational orientations and memory strategy indicated that there was a significantly negative relationship between amotivation ($\beta = -0.194$, $p<0.009$) and memory strategy, and while intrinsic orientation had a significantly positive ($\beta=0.250$, $p<0.008$) relationship with memory strategy, extrinsic orientation had no significant relationship with it. In addition, there was a significantly negative ($\beta = -0.147$, $p<0.04$) relationship between cognitive strategy and amotivation. Also, *intrinsic orientation* had a significantly positive relationship ($\beta=0.255$, $p<0.006$) with cognitive strategy. But, there was not a significant relationship between extrinsic orientation and these type of strategies (memory, cognitive).

Furthermore, findings on relationship between motivational orientations and compensation strategy showed that only intrinsic orientation had a significant relationship ($\beta=0.198$, $p<0.04$) with compensation strategy. Also, scored obtained from amotivation and extrinsic orientation did not have a significant relationship with this strategy.

As shown in Table 2, there is a negatively significant
relationship between amotivation and metacognitive strategy ($\beta=0.260, p<0.0001$). Intrinsic orientation had a significantly positive relationship ($\beta=0.287, p<0.001$) with this type of strategy. However, there was not a significant relationship between extrinsic orientation and metacognitive strategy.

There was a significantly positive relationship ($\beta=0.329, p<0.001$) only between intrinsic orientation and affective strategy. In other words, increasing intrinsic orientation was concomitant with increasing use of affective strategy.

Eventually, regarding the relationship between motivational orientation and social strategy, findings indicated that only intrinsic orientation had a significantly positive relationship with social strategy ($\beta=0.302, p<0.001$). Moreover, amotivation and extrinsic orientations showed no significant relationship with social strategy. Thus, the answer to the second research question is intrinsic orientation which almost predicted all strategies.

DISCUSSION

From initial finding intrinsic orientation has a significantly positive relationship with EFL (for present research) language learning strategies. As it was mentioned earlier, increasing intrinsic orientation is compatible with enhancing use of language strategies. Hence, this finding is in line with some previous research by Ellis’ (2001) in which he maintained that language learners who enjoy intrinsic orientation utilize various language learning strategies.

Results showed that in spite of the fact that there was no significant relationship among motivational orientations and use of compensation, affective and social strategies, showed a significantly negative relationship with memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Thus, whenever language learners become demotivated, the use of those strategies decreased. Some English language research, for instance, Noels et al. (2000) also confirmed findings of this study. In addition, our findings clarified that there was an indirect relationship between motivation and English language learning tasks.

Findings from this research failed to find a significant relationship between extrinsic orientation and language learning strategies scores. This finding is congruous with previous studies. Since intrinsic orientation is highly related to external data analysis, it would not have any significant relationship with LLSs due to its relationship with internal data analysis. Moreover, according to Noels et al. (2000), extrinsic orientation is repressive; there is no significant relationship between it and EFL promising activities.

Regarding the second research question, findings denoted that, in contrast to amotivation and extrinsic orientations, intrinsic motivation has predicted English language learning strategies more than others.

This finding contended that intrinsic orientation was developed as an alternative to goal-directed theories of motivation that emphasize the role of extrinsic rewards and punishments. It should be noted here that one way in which intrinsic orientation in second or foreign language learning might be achieved is only by providing EFL/ESL students with communication while employing ELLSs.

CONCLUSION

According to Rayan and Deci (2000a), intrinsic motivation is a vital factor in advanced level learning and critical thinking. In fact, human being, regardless of rewards and external stimuli, is an active, curious, internally endowed creature with learning capacity. This natural tendency is among the fundamental factors not only for social, cognitive and physical development but also a determinative in self-regulated learning (Rayan and Deci, 2000). It should be noted that although intrinsic motivation is considered as a natural inclination, it but needs specific circumstances to be nourished. They believed that extrinsic events leading to complacency and autonomy in achieving a task would increase intrinsic motivation for doing that activity.

Naiman et al. (1978) came to the conclusion that the most successful learners are not necessarily those to whom a language comes very easily; they are those who display certain typical characteristics, most of them clearly associated with motivation.

- Positive task orientation
- Ego involvement
Table 3. Coefficients of LLSs and predict variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LLS</th>
<th>PV</th>
<th>AM β</th>
<th>p&lt;</th>
<th>EM β</th>
<th>p&lt;</th>
<th>IM β</th>
<th>p&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.260</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.287</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.0198</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.194</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>-0.034</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LLS: Language Learning Strategies
PV: Predict Variable
Ins: Indices
AM: Amotivation
EM: Extrinsic Motivation
IM: Intrinsic Motivation

- Need for achievement
- High aspirations
- Goal orientation
- Perseverance
- Tolerance of ambiguity

To sum up, syllabus designers and foreign language instructors ought to familiarize language learners with the significance of learning foreign languages (especially English language) and utilize it as an essential means in order to acquire up-to-date knowledge, enhance scientific communication and thereby create a sense of complacency for learning foreign languages in them. In fact, by doing so, one could nourish intrinsic motivation in foreign language learners and paved the way to use language learner strategies which are one of the methods to deeply process the data and is one of the important factors in self-regulated strategy.

In order to make the language learning process a more motivating experience instructors need to put a great deal of thought into developing programs which maintain student interest and have obtainable short term goals. In the foreign language classroom environment, what undoubtedly influences learners’ learning outcomes is their interpretation of interpersonal teacher behavior. So, in language learning, the teacher plays the main role. Thus, he/she should listen to his/her students with empathy, and provide them with the support that they so greatly need. At university level this may include, as suggested by Berwick and Ross (1989), any number of foreign exchange programs with other universities, overseas "homestay" programs, or any other activities which may help to motivate students to improve their target language proficiency. Foreign language teachers need to create interesting lessons in which the students’ attention is gained. This can sometimes be accomplished by the use of teaching strategies which are not often called upon by other teachers in mainstream subject areas. Encouraging students to become more active participants in a lesson can sometimes assist them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language. Successful communication using the target language should result in students feeling some sense of accomplishment. Research in the area suggests L2 achievement which strongly affects learner motivation.

The use of an interesting text can also help to increase the motivation level of students in the classroom. Many Iranian texts often contain material which fails to capture the interest of students due to the heavy emphasis on vocabulary and grammar. Many foreign texts, however, which have been designed for EFL, and specifically the Iranian market, often contain topics which can create a great deal of classroom interaction and help to motivate students to develop their language skills. It is important for the instructor to take advantage of such discussion topics and help students to realize that, even though they may see no need to become proficient in a second language, the study of another language and culture can only enhance their perception and understanding of other cultures.

No matter what the underlying motivation to study a foreign language, what cannot be disputed is the fact that motivation is an important variable when examining successful second language acquisition. Iran is perhaps, a unique environment in which to learn English, especially when taking into consideration the many factors which influence the manner in which the language is taught. Although change may be slow to the education system, but recent struggles for introducing the English language as a subject in elementary school, changes made in methods of...
teaching and writing new textbooks can be really helpful for further motivating students to achieve higher levels of proficiency in the future.

REFERENCES


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