

Critical Evaluation of Research Methodologies used in L2 Motivational Research: Social Psychology and the Rise of Qualitative Research†

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第二言語習得における学習動機(L2 motivation)の理論的フレームワークを支えている社会心理学の研究方法を考察した。第二言語習得における学習動機の研究は1960年代からGardner等によって提唱されている統合的動機(integrative motivation)と道具的動機(instrumental motivation)の研究が中心である。この研究方法は社会心理学に裏打ちされており、後続の研究に至るまで脈々と受け継がれている。社会心理学は実証主義のパラダイムに根ざしており、研究成果は量的データで発表されている。一方、構成主義のパラダイムに立脚し、質的データで第二言語習得における学習動機を研究する流れも形成されてきている。本研究は質的研究による第二言語習得における学習動機を研究することの重要性と可能性を提唱した。

Key words: Social psychology, L2 motivation, Research paradigm, Quantitative research, Qualitative research

1 Introduction

Social psychology contributes to our society by explaining the nature of human behaviours and their underlying psychological processes. It gives insights explaining “why we do what we do, and to what extent?” in the real world. It not only contributes to the wider society, but also to specific areas such as law, medicine and education. In this paper, I would like to explain the characteristics of the mainstream social psychology and its relevance to second language (L2) motivation.

Some of the discussions will focus on the research methodology of social psychology, in particular, its research paradigm and features derived from it. There will be discussion on motivation and language achievement, which has been one of the most remarkable findings in L2 motivational research which is grounded in social psychology.

2 Social psychology

2.1 Characteristics of social psychology

What is social psychology? In the real world we live with other people, and are related with them in various ways. Social psychology primarily focuses on individuals' mind in a social environment and is concerned with the process of how thoughts, emotions and behaviours of individuals are influenced by actual, imagined or implied presence of others (Ando, Daibo and Ikeda, 1995: 2, 5; Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 4). In contrast to sociology which is the neighbouring area that studies groups and societies as the unit of

analysis, social psychology studies individuals (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 6; Myers, 2008: 4). The term ‘individual’ does not refer to a specific one, but refers to a general one in this field. Social psychology deals with interaction and mutual influence among one another. Simply put, social psychology is science that clarifies the psychological process of individuals which is influenced by social factors.

Typically, there are four levels of research conducted within social psychology (Ando et al., 1995: 4 – 6).

1. Psychological process within an individual (e.g. identity, social cognition, personality, etc...).
2. Psychological process in interpersonal behaviour (e.g. attitude, love, helping behaviour, aggression, etc...). This is where many studies have been done traditionally.
3. Psychological process of individuals in group behaviour (e.g. group dynamics, social loafing, leadership, competition and cooperation, etc...).
4. Psychological process of individuals in collective behaviour, or in social level (e.g. riot, propaganda, mass media, etc...).

Human behaviour positions itself as the basis and the common underlying term throughout these four levels. Hogg and Vaughan (2005: 4, 646) define behaviour as “[w]hat people actually do that can be objectively measured.” Behaviour is the key concept which researchers aim to clarify and account for. It also acts as the gateway for researchers to infer abstract matters such as thoughts, emotions, beliefs,

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attitudes and intentions.

2 • 2 Research paradigm

Which can social psychology be labelled, humanities or science? It is science (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 4; Myers, 2008: 4). It is founded on positivism (Graumann, 2001: 7 – 8; Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 25 – 26). It aims to explain and predict the psychological process involved in social behaviour, predominantly using empirical research that processes and produces measurable and quantifiable data which is observable through human senses from the perspective of an outsider, thus being scientific and objective (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 8 – 17; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 21 – 27). Fact and logic play a vital role to find reality that is single, external, observable and stable. The nature of knowledge is hard, objective, real and tangible (Cohen et al. 2000: 7). Scientific research seeks to produce universal law-like generalizations, which are predominantly context-free and trans-cultural within the positivistic paradigm (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 23; Cohen et al. 2000: 8 – 9; Myers, 2008: 4). Regarding human behaviour, which is often the objective of research amongst social psychologists, it is considered to be predictable, caused and subject to both internal pressures and external forces which can be observed and measured (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 22).

2 • 3 Typical approaches to research

The purpose of such social scientific research is to discover generalizable and universal laws to explain reality, facts and causes of the psychological process related to social behaviour of individuals. Theory and hypothesis are vital to scientific research. As can be seen from the chart below, theory summarises and implies testable predictions, namely hypotheses. Hypothesis testing validates whether a certain theory is true or not (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 23).

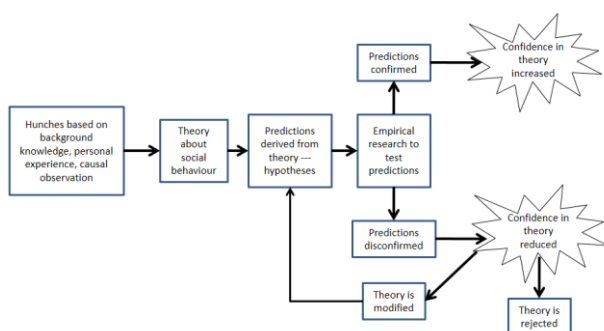


Fig. 1 A model of the scientific method employed by social psychologists (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 8)

Reliability and validity are crucial factors in collecting and measuring data. Manstead and Semin (2001: 97) state that a data measurement is reliable, “if it yields the same result on more than one occasion or when used by different individuals.” Thus, in order to raise the precision of the analysis, large-scale research is often taken. Regarding validity, Manstead and Semin (2001: 97) state that, “a measure is valid to the extent that it measures precisely what it is supposed to measure.”

In order to collect data, there are two typical approaches of research in social psychology, namely correlational research and experimental research (Ando et al., 1995: 8 – 12; Myers, 2008: 18 – 29).

2 • 3 • 1 Correlational research

What is correlational research? It is the “study of the naturally occurring relationships among variables” (Myers, 2008: 18). For example, if a researcher hypothesised that ESL/EFL learners will achieve higher marks in English by being motivated to learn English, he/she will normally select at least two variables such as ‘motivation to learn English’ and ‘language achievement’. This approach is typically seen in L2 motivational research (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; 1972). The next process is to use questionnaires to measure and analyse their correlations (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 14). Random samples should be chosen to represent the population under study (Myers, 2008: 21).

Correlation coefficients are used to measure the strength of the relationship between two given variables. The index of the association between two variables varies from +1, indicating a perfect positive relationship to -1, indicating a perfect negative relationship. The value of 0 indicates the absence of any correlation (Skehan, 1989: 13; Cohen et al., 2000: 193). If the indices of ‘motivation to learn English’ and ‘language achievement’ are proportional, it would indicate a high positive correlation, whereas if they are unproportional, it would indicate high negative correlation. If no relationship between the two indices can be found, it would indicate zero correlation.

From the education researchers’ point of view, Cohen et al. (2000: 202) point out that positive correlations ranging from 0.20 to 0.35 show only slight relationship, those ranging from 0.35 to 0.65 showing moderate relationship, those ranging from 0.65 to 0.85 showing strong relationship, and those over 0.85 showing very strong relationship. From the applied linguistics researchers’ point of view, which is more

relevant to my field, Skehan (1989: 13) points out that, correlations are likely to fit in the range between 0.30 to 0.60. He also points out that positive correlations around 0.30 signify weak correlations, 0.40 to 0.50 as moderate ones, and correlations over 0.60 as strong ones (ibid: 14).

Once data is taken and it can be stated that those who are motivated to learn English achieve higher marks, one can determine that there is a positive correlation between the two variables. This is commonly illustrated using the chart below. As can be seen, the cause-and-effect logic is not clear, which will be discussed in depth later on. Next, I would like to introduce experimental research which provides detailed and clearer explanation of the correlation between variables.

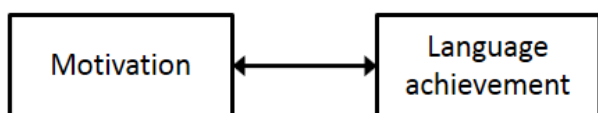


Fig. 2 Correlation between two variables

2 • 3 • 2 Experimental research

According to Myers (2008: 18), experimental research clarifies cause and effect relationships using manipulation of one or more variables whilst controlling others. Experimental research, particularly true experiment is commonly used in natural science experiments. This is also used to explain human behaviours. The setting is controlled to eliminate bias and confounding (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 11). Ando et al. (1995: 10) point out that there are four steps in this procedure.

1. Define independent variables which are assumed to be affecting the psychological phenomenon in which the experimenter aims to analyse, or account for.
2. Fix other factors to maintain consistency amongst different experiments.
3. Randomly assign participants to different groups.
4. Observe and measure each participant's response as dependent variables in a specific situation.

For instance, in order to verify the hypothesis, "if learners have opportunity to learn from teachers who are native speakers of the target language, they will achieve higher marks in their foreign language test", the participants with similar proficiency need to be randomly assigned to either a group who will have the opportunity to learn from native speakers, or to a

group who will not have such chance. A sample process of a typical true experiment is shown below.

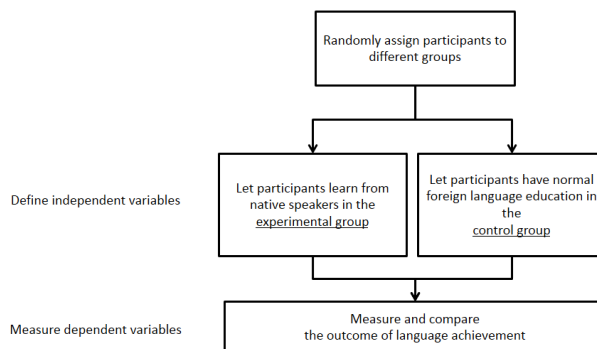


Fig. 3 A sample flow chart of a true experiment

However, it is difficult to conduct a true experiment in education because of limitation often encountered in assigning participants to clear-cut experimental group and control group. Hence, quasi-experiment is commonly conducted, which does not require random sampling of homogenous participants (Ando et al., 1995: 11). For instance, in the same kind of experiment as above, participants from school X may all be assigned to the experimental group, whereas participants from school Y may all be assigned to the control group. It lacks homogeneity of participants comparing to true experiment, but is valid and more feasible in the field of education.

I would like to point out that social psychological research, particularly experimental research has potential risk of violating ethics, especially in the field of education. The ethical issue is among one of the things I would like contend as limitations of social psychology, which will be discussed in the next section.

2 • 4 Limitations of social psychology

I would like to indicate four kinds of limitations of social psychology in this section. Firstly, I would like to point out the ethical issues which are preponderantly seen in experimental research. Secondly, I would like to indicate the ambiguity of causation which is mostly seen in correlational research. Thirdly, I would like to highlight the limitation derived from the paradigmatic nature, followed by the final point, the lack of pedagogical implications for teachers.

2 • 4 • 1 Ethical issues

As has been discussed in Section 2.3.2, some factitive manipulation is done in experimental

research, which is necessary to maintain objectivity and to replicate a specific situation in which certain social behaviour occurs.

In the given example in Section 2.3.2, learners have the risk of being assigned to a less desirable group than the other one for a considerable amount of time, being deprived of fair treatment and equal opportunity in receiving proper education. For example, if a learner was assigned to a group which resulted in achieving lower marks in a given school subject, and he/she was deprived of the opportunity of getting better education, the research is very likely to be labelled as unethical.

Another instance is found from the actual experimental research done on people's aggression to clarify the psychological process involved in crime. Berkowitz and LePage (1967) argued that when a person is angry, he/she is potentially prepared for aggressive behaviour, and the presence of an aggressive cue such as weapons will actually yield aggressive behaviour. Berkowitz and LePage (1967: 204) asked their confederate to make half of their psychology undergraduate participants angry. Then all the participants were given chance to give electric shock back to the confederate. There were four groups which should be highlighted:

1. The first group were shown weapons on a table next to the key that gave electric shock. They were informed that the weapons had nothing to do with the confederate.
2. The second group were shown weapons and were told that it belonged to the confederate.
3. The third group were not shown any weapon at all. Thus they were the control group.
4. The fourth group were shown badminton racquets and shuttlecocks which had nothing to do with the confederate.

The result of the experiment was that the angry participants in two groups which saw the weapons on the table retaliated more than the other groups. Hence Berkowitz and LePage (1967: 202, 206) concluded that the presence of the stimuli commonly associated with aggression elicited aggressive responses.

As it can be observed from the above experiment, there are some ethical issues that need to be pointed out. To prevent misuse of experiments and to contribute to society by providing ethically acceptable research reports, the American Psychological Association (APA) published an ethical guideline, "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" for psychologists (American Psychological

Association, 2010).

The core issues of some unethical experiments, such as the one seen in Berkowitz and LePage (1967) are that they involve deception against the participants who participated in the experiment. The participants were deceived about the confederate believing that he/she was there by chance, and also that the weapons belonged to the confederate. Myers (2008: 26) points out that approximately one-third of social psychological research used deception, whereas Hogg and Vaughan (2005: 19) report that it is between 50 to 75 percent. Ethical standard 5.01 in American Psychological Association (2010) states that deception in research is not tolerated for three reasons. Firstly, deceptive method is not justifiable unless it can be justified by scientific, educational, or applied value of the outcome of the research, and that there are no alternative methods. Secondly, psychologists are not to deceive their participants regarding possibility of physical pain or severe emotional distress. Lastly, participants should be informed of any other deception preferably towards the end of their participation, but no later than at the end of the data collection.

Hence, some notable studies in social psychological research are precariously at the risk of being labelled as unethical. I believe that ends do not justify means. As Hogg and Vaughan (2005: 19) point out, it is important that the participants have the freedom of choice, and are given informed consent and debriefing. In other words, participants have the right to know what the research is about, the right to check their data, and the right to withdraw from research.

2 • 4 • 2 Ambiguity of causation

When correlational research is done, an observable positive correlation between two variables does not clearly signify which is the cause and which is the effect (Cohen et al. 2000: 201; Myers, 2008: 20). As for the example of correlation of motivation and language achievement in Section 2.3.1, Ellis (1985: 119) points out, "we do not know whether it is motivation that produces successful learning, or successful learning that enhances motivation." From the given example, one can interpret data as:

1. Those who are motivated to learn English achieve higher marks in English.
2. Those who achieve higher marks in English become motivated.

In L2 motivational research, the first example is recognised as the 'causative hypothesis' in which motivation is seen as the cause of language

achievement. Gardner and Lambert's (1959) concern was how motivation related to language achievement. They concluded that integrative motivation contributed to higher achievement more than instrumental motivation, which was derived from the analysis that there was a significant positive correlation between motivation and language achievement. Since then, Gardner and Lambert's basic belief is that motivation determines language achievement. In spite of criticism, Gardner has consistently proposed this view stating that, "[T]he present results offer no support for the notion that achievement influences the nature and amount of attitude change, thus severely questioning this alternative interpretation" (1985: 99).

In contrast, the second one is known as the 'resultative hypothesis' in which motivation is regarded as the result or the product of achieving higher marks. Various researchers have supported this view (Savignon, 1972; Burstall, 1975; Oller and Perkins, 1978a; 1978b). Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves (1974: 244) declared the validity of this standpoint by stating that, "in the language-learning context, nothing succeeds like success."

I believe that it is plausible to take an eclectic point of view to state that the relation is interactive rather than unreliably validating just one direction and rejecting the other. However, should a further investigation be necessary to clarify the precise cause-and-effect, one should replicate the experiment several times, or conduct path analysis (Ando et al., 1995: 9).

2 • 4 • 3 Paradigmatic issue: Overgeneralization

As has been discussed in Section 2.2, social psychology is deeply positivistic. Because it seeks to generalize theories based on empirical research which is reductive, some conclusions are apt to be criticised for overgeneralization. Hogg and Vaughan (2005: 23) point out the overly reductionist nature of social psychology which failed to address the essentially social nature of the human experience.

Also, as has been the case in the experiment by Berkowitz and LePage (1967) covered in Section 2.4.1, participants in experimental research have traditionally been psychology undergraduates who could earn credits as part of their degree. This leads to criticism that they do not represent the whole population, and that overgeneralization is apparent in such research.

Another example is from the L2 motivational

research. As mentioned in the previous section, Gardner and Lambert (1959) argued that Anglophone speakers achieved higher marks in French when their integrative motivation was higher than their instrumental motivation. Since then the relatively prevalent belief in L2 motivational research has been that having integrative motivation results in higher language achievement than having instrumental motivation. I would like to argue that it is not the case in EFL contexts such as Japan, when tangible target language speakers are not usually present for the learners to think about integrating at all. Yashima (2004: 68) points out that Japanese researchers and practitioners' interest towards L2 motivational research is weak, which she attributes to the inapplicability of such theory. This inapplicability is due to overgeneralization caused by the reductive nature and also by the context-free nature of positivism. A common weakness conspicuous in findings derived from such research is its fragmentary nature.

2 • 4 • 4 Lack of pedagogical implications

It has been pointed out that the social psychological framework in L2 motivation proved less beneficial for language teachers because it merely explained the correlation between motivation and language achievement. What lacked from such findings were implications to improve pedagogy in classrooms to enhance motivation of L2 learners (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991: 469, 502; Yashima, 2004: 46).

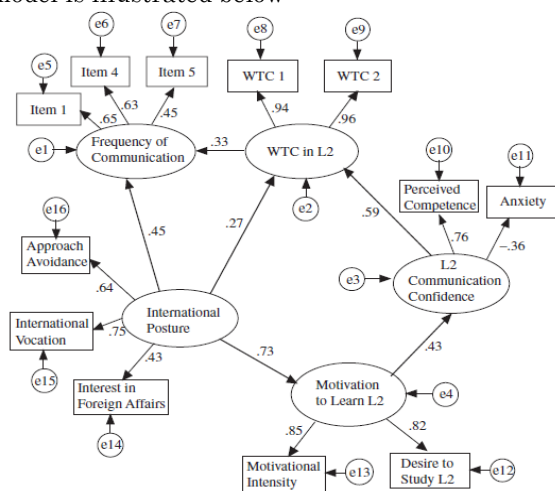
I would like to point out that this is a very common weakness inherent in social psychological research. An analogy of this shall be illustrated using the comparison between accountants and consultants. Accountants investigate the financial situation of clients, report on the causation, and merely point out problems, whereas consultants propose a solution to for a better business and added value, utilising the information gathered. In short, social psychological research can depict problems, but it cannot directly propose solutions to them unlike action research.

2 • 5 Strengths: Measurability

Now I would like to focus on the strength of social psychology. Positivism has strengths despite criticisms that have been highlighted. The superiority of social psychology is that the research findings are scientific and measurable. When we want a full picture of something, 5Ws (who, what, where, when, why) and 2 Hs (how, how much) are useful. It is a self-evident truth that it is more

appropriate to use quantitative analysis than qualitative analysis to answer the question, ‘how much?’ Quantitative research is necessary to explain matters such as to what extent motivation is correlated with language achievement, so that researchers and practitioners can see a hard, objective, real and tangible fact.

The measurability is a strength that qualitative research cannot have on its own. Research by Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) exemplifies this, which measured the correlation between ‘international posture’ and ‘frequency of communication’ by collecting questionnaire data over two phases. Yashima’s (2002:57) concept of ‘international posture’ encompasses both integrative and instrumental motivations and can be defined as, “interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures, among others”. The first phase examined 154 high school students in Japan who received content based instruction from native English speakers, whereas the second phase further investigated 57 students who went on to study a year in the USA. Based on the first phase in Japan, the researchers revealed that international posture significantly predicted both L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) and the frequency of communication, showing positive correlations 0.27 and 0.45 respectively (Yashima et al., 2004:134). This model is illustrated below:



N=154. All path coefficients are significant at $p < .01$. $\chi^2(48) = 74.48, p < .01$. RMSEA = .060; GFI = .93; CFI = .96.

Fig. 4 Results of structural equation modelling: L2 communication model with standardized estimates (Yashima et al., 2004:134)

3 The rise of qualitative research in L2 motivational research

I suggest that qualitative research should be used hand in hand with quantitative research, represented by social psychology, because L2 motivational research needs data from both sides. Dörnyei (2001: 241 – 244) argued that combined use of quantitative and qualitative research may produce the best of both approaches whilst neutralising the weaknesses and biases inherent in both sides. I would like to quote his statement given over a decade ago, which best summarised the potentiality of such collaboration predicted by then. “I anticipate that the next decade will bring about a consolidation of the wide range of new themes and theoretical orientations that have emerged in the past 10-15 years, and that the often speculative theorizing will be grounded in solid research findings, from both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms” (Dörnyei, 2003: 27).

His statement correctly foretold what happened over the past decade. Firstly, various qualitative research embracing critical theory shed light on L2 motivation from a unique perspective. Pavlenko (2002:280-281) critiqued social-psychological approaches on the grounds that “attitudes, motivation or language learning beliefs have clear social origins and are shaped and reshaped by the contexts in which the learners find themselves”. A similar view on L2 motivation is expressed by Norton (2010:161) who reframed the social-psychological term L2 motivation as ‘investment’ which derived from a sociological and anthropological approach as she contends, “if learners ‘invest’ in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital”.

Secondly, a number of qualitative research shaped by social constructivism have also added a new perspective on L2 motivation. Lamb (2004) examined changes in L2 motivation of Indonesian junior high school students over two years, using questionnaire, observation and interviews. He points out that due to lack of tangible native speakers of English language in Indonesia, students do not study English in order to integrate with a particular person, but instead seeks to study in order to be involved with a globalised society represented by abstract and diversified English speakers in which English is used as a lingua franca. Meanwhile, Ushioda (2009:216-220) contends that social psychological L2 motivational research is rooted in the Cartesian dualism, which detaches the individual

from the society, and calls for ‘a person-in-context relational view of motivation’ that regards learners as real persons and motivation as an organic process.

In short, findings derived from qualitative research highlighted the social dimension of L2 motivation which was rather marginalised in quantitative research which predominantly examined its cognitive aspect. I therefore suggest that L2 motivation cannot be examined without considering its social nature and without treating the participants as real persons who construct their attitude/motivation through interaction with society.

4 Conclusion

Social psychology is positivistic and provides scientific evidence and explanations. For L2 motivational research, it has provided insights to explain the psychological process of attitude/motivation and their correlation with behaviour such as language achievement or L2 use by making use of correlational research. The ambiguity of correlations can be dealt with by utilising path analysis or software such as Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). Social psychology excels at providing measurable and quantifiable results.

Meanwhile, social psychology is fragmentary due to its reductive nature. In terms of L2 motivational research, it has disadvantages due to its context-free nature derived from positivism. It excludes the process in which attitude/motivation is formed as individuals interact with the social context. It is detrimental when matters external to the individual such as peers, teachers or host families play a vital role in shaping the attitude/motivation of individuals. Also, attitude/motivation is influenced not only by context, but also with time. One’s motivation is prone to be different before studying L2, during studying, and after studying. Therefore, research derived from social constructivism should compliment this aspect, by providing more holistic, context-bound, process-oriented and qualitative perspectives. The real challenge is to be faced when integrating qualitative research with quantitative research, which is nowadays under trial and error.

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