

USE, ATTITUDE, AND MOTIVATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION¹

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I. Introduction

This paper focuses on two important issues in foreign language learning and teaching: the use of the foreign language outside the classroom and motivation and attitude. We describe an investigation we conducted on these two issues and report on two specific claims. The first is that the use of English outside the classroom is related to classroom achievement; the second is that attitude and motivation are also related to achievement in the foreign language classroom.

The paper is organized as follows. We first provide some background information on the significance of the two variables. Next, we present information about the methodology and procedure of the investigation. We then present and discuss the results. We conclude with a discussion of the significance of the investigation for the teaching and learning of English in Japan and with some suggestions for future research.

II. Background Information

A. The Use of the Target Language Outside the Classroom

There have been a number of investigations on the contribution of informal, out-of-classroom contact with the target language in the acquisition of that language. These include Krashen and Hartnett (1974), Seliger (1977), Willerman (1979), Martin (1980) Monshi-Tousi, Hosseine-Fatemi, and Oller (1980), Day (1985), and Spada (1986). While some of these investigations have found that the more proficient learners seem to have a greater amount of informal contact with the target language, others report that there is no

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apparent benefit to the use of the target language away from the classroom.

Our study was somewhat different from others noted above in that our subjects were not adults and were studying a foreign language, English, in their own country, Japan. By conducting such a study, we hoped to be able to isolate more neatly the amount and type of contact our subjects had with English outside the classroom and thereby provide a more definitive look at its relationship to achievement in the English classroom.

B. Attitude and Motivation in Foreign Language Acquisition

The importance of the role of attitude and motivation in the acquisition of foreign languages is so well known that we will not go into it here. We should mention that issue of the relationship between attitude and motivation and the use of the foreign language outside the classroom has not been rigorously investigated. There have been a number of claims but, to our knowledge, little has been done. It is hoped that our study will make a small contribution to our understanding of this important topic.

III. Methodology and Procedure

In this section we first describe the two instruments which we used in collecting the data: The English Use Questionnaire and the Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire. Included in this discussion is information about the construction and content of the two questionnaires. In addition, we describe how a rating of the subjects' achievement in their English classes was obtained. Finally, we describe the subjects and the administration of the two questionnaires.

A. English Use Questionnaire

The English Use Questionnaire was developed and administered in Japanese to ensure that the subjects would be able to complete it without any difficulty. It is designed to elicit from the subjects information about their use of English outside the classroom during the previous month in the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For each of the four skills, the subjects are asked to indicate the frequency with which they used each of them during the past month, if at all. The subjects have five choices, shown as Table One.

The subjects are given a number of possible circumstances in which the

particular skill might be used outside the English classroom. For example, in the skill area of speaking English, the subjects are given a choice of eight situations, displayed as Table 2. Thus the English Use Questionnaire obtains from the subjects detailed information about the situations in which they used English, and the frequency of their use of English in these situations.

An initial draft of the English Use Questionnaire was constructed in Japanese and administered to approximately 75 students attending the same private junior and senior high school as the subjects of this report. Following the results of an item analysis, the Questionnaire was revised. We used the revised form in the investigation reported here.

B. Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire

The Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire, like the English Use Questionnaire, was developed and administered in Japanese. It is designed to obtain information about the subjects' attitudes toward and motivation to learn English. It makes use of a seven-point semantic differential scale, consistent with instruments used by other researchers in the United States and Canada on attitudes and motivation in foreign language learning.

There are 15 statements designed to measure attitude and 11 to measure motivation. The subjects are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each of the 26 statements. Agreement is indicated by seven statements, shown as Table 3.

A first version of the Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire was constructed in Japanese and administered to the same subjects that received the pilot version of the English Use Questionnaire. Following the results of an item analysis, the Questionnaire was revised and used in the investigation reported here.

C. Achievement in English Class

In order to obtain an indication of how well the subjects were doing in their English classes, we asked their teachers to rank them on a scale from one to five, with five being the highest possible score, and one, the lowest. It was decided to use this procedure rather than asking the subjects themselves for an overall assessment of their achievement in their classes. We believe that asking for a ranking from their teachers could result in a more accurate

assessment, as the students might tend to deprecate or downgrade their own achievements.

D. Subjects

This research project was carried out among 124 girls in their first and third years in a junior and senior high school during the academic year 1985-86. There were 30 subjects in Junior One, 34 in Junior Three, 34 in Senior One, and 24 in Senior Three.

E. Procedure

Both the questionnaires were given to the subjects twice, once after the school year began and again before the end of the school year. They were administered at the same time by distributing them to the subjects' English teachers. The subjects completed both questionnaires in class. Their teachers were present to answer any questions they might have had as they filled them out.

The subjects' teachers collected the completed questionnaires and returned them to the researchers. The teachers reported that it took the subjects approximately 15 minutes to complete both instruments.

After the teachers had returned the completed questionnaires to us, we asked them to rank their students on a scale from one to five, as we just described. Thus, we obtained teachers' rankings of their students twice during the school year, covering the same time period as the English Use and Attitude and Motivation Questionnaires.

IV. Results

A. English Use Questionnaire

The English Use Questionnaire results were obtained by a procedure which allotted a score to each category in the four skills according to the frequency and type of use. The more often the use in what we determined to be an area of use which had relatively more significance, the higher the score. The highest possible score a subject could receive is 459, which would mean that she had used English every day in every category in the four skills during the previous month.

A close examination of the scores of the 124 subjects indicates that in general they did not use English very much outside the English classroom. As you can see from Table 4, the greatest uses of English outside the English classroom were in listening and reading, respectively. The skills of speaking and writing were seldom used away from the English classroom.

B. Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire

The Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire was scored by awarding seven points for the most favorable responses on the seven-point semantic differential scale. Since there were 15 statements dealing with attitudes towards English, a perfect score on attitudes would be 105. A perfect score on the 11 statements dealing with motivation would be 77.

The results of the scoring of the Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire for both time periods are shown as Table 5. The column on the right side of this table shows the mean per statement.

C. Comparison of the Results with Teachers' Rankings

We used a correlation matrix to determine if there were any relationships among the results of the two questionnaires and the rankings of the subjects by their English teachers. An analysis of the matrix showed no significant correlations, either positive or negative, between teachers' rankings and scores on either the English Use Questionnaire or the Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire. These results mean, for example, that a student's listening to or reading English outside the classroom had no relation to the ranking given to her by her English teacher.

V. Discussion

Since there are numerous opportunities in the area where the school is located to use English, the results from the English Use Questionnaire the results are somewhat disappointing. While we did not expect our subjects to report a great deal of use of English outside the classroom, the small amounts reported are not encouraging. Given the limited usage of English outside the classroom, the lack of correlation between use and teacher ranking is to be expected. We cannot expect nothing to correlate with something.

The fact that the subjects reported using the skills of listening and reading more than speaking and writing is not surprising, given the receptive

nature of listening and reading. Though the situation is gradually changing at this private school, the skills of speaking and writing do not receive as much attention as listening and reading.

The results from the second questionnaire indicate slightly positive attitudes and motivation toward English. The subjects reported somewhat higher motivation than favorable attitudes. But, all in all, these results are also disappointing. They are, however, in line with the relative lack of use of English outside the English classroom reported by the subjects.

Finally, the lack of a significant correlation between the rankings the teachers gave to their students and the results of the Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire is surprising. We anticipated that these results would correlate significantly, since the Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire is similar to those employed successfully in numerous other investigations. Perhaps the lack of correlation with achievement could be explained by the only slightly positive attitudes and motivation. Like the English usage results, we should not expect correlation when there is not much to correlate.

Before concluding, let us make some caveats. First, the data on the English Use Questionnaire were self-report and, as a result, may be unreliable. We should also point out that the English Use Questionnaire measures only the quantitative use of English. It does not obtain information on the quality of the use of English outside the classroom.

Further, we do not know what criteria the teachers in our study used in ranking their students. We can assume that they had in mind an academic ability, but we do not know what other factors might have entered into the equation.

Finally, the subjects in our investigation who received the highest rankings from their teachers may have been those who treated English primarily as an academic subject and were motivated primarily by the desire to achieve a high grade. Thus, their attitudes and motivation towards English were perhaps secondary. This, of course, is speculation.

VI. Conclusion

We believe that the results presented here provide empirical evidence for something that many junior and senior high school English teachers unfortunately feel--teaching English in Japan is a challenge! Like foreign

language teachers elsewhere, we must seek ways to motivate our students and improve their attitudes toward the target language. We must be alert to new ways of encouraging our students to use the target language outside the classroom. Further, we might want to provide our students with more opportunities to learn and to use the skills of speaking and writing. If they were provided with such opportunities, the students might be more inclined to attempt to use these two skills outside the English classroom.

In addition, it might be advisable to help teachers be more aware of or sensitive to the attitudes and motivation of their students. Given the results of previous research in North America in particular on the relationship between successful foreign language learning and attitude and motivation, perhaps our teachers could be trained to recognize and encourage those students who display more than a passing interest in learning English.

We conclude by noting that future research into these key variables might include a more objective evaluation of the subjects' achievement in the foreign language, and an instrument which could measure the quality as well as the quantity of the use of the foreign language outside the classroom. It would also be important to have research which would trace the development of attitude and motivation and the use of English over a period of time.

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Table 1.
Frequency of Use of English Outside the Classroom

1. Everyday
2. Two to three times a week
3. Once a week
4. Two to three times a month
5. Once a month

Table 2.
Situations for Speaking English Outside the Classroom

1. With foreign friends
2. With Japanese friends
3. With native English conversation teachers at school
4. With native English teachers outside the school
5. With Japanese English conversation teachers
6. With family
7. On the phone
8. Other

Table 3.
Statements Used on Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. slightly agree
- d. I can't tell (or no difference)
- e. slightly disagree
- f. disagree
- g. strongly disagree

Table 4.
Use of Four Skill Areas Outside the Classroom (N=124)

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
Listening - Time 1	18.1	24.7
- Time 2	15.5	17.4
Speaking - Time 1	4.6	12.0
- Time 2	2.6	7.2
Reading - Time 1	14.6	24.2
- Time 2	13.5	19.8
Writing - Time 1	3.7	9.2
- Time 2	2.1	6.2

Table 5.
Results of Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire (N=124)

	Overall		
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>& S.D. per Statement</u>
Attitude - Time 1	68.8	9.8	4.6
- Time 2	70.0	7.8	4.7
Motivation - Time 1	56.3	12.9	5.1
- Time 2	59.0	11.2	5.4