

Cultural Motivation and Its Impact on Foreign Language Learning in Globalizing World

Shiva Azadipour, Islamic Azad University, Ardestan Branch, Isfahan, Iran
Shivaazadipour@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study aims at focusing on the relationship between motivation, culture, and success in foreign language learning in globalizing world. Many studies have been done to examine the relationship between them. The studies showed that culture can play a motivating role in language learning success. Considering Gardner's instrumental and integrative motivation, a learner with a high degree of integrative motivation is likely to make more efforts to form bonds with people of the target culture. To conduct the survey 48 students of Ardestan Azad University were chosen. Some activities and techniques were taken to promote their multicultural competence. In the first session a brief explanation was given to the students along with some questionnaires regarding cultural issues to answer. During 16 weeks of the semester students were taught and monitored through class discussions, essay writings etc. The goal of the activities was to encourage and estimate their respect, tolerance and empathy to people of different cultures. In the last session a questionnaire designed by the researcher was used to collect data. It was composed of three sections: 1) 11 statements about cultural issues to be rated with a likert scale of agreement (based on the Bennett's intercultural communicative model). 2) 10 rating questions (considering Byram & Risager's multidimensional model of ICC). 3) 5 open questions about their belief and behavior to elaborate on. The results showed that respect for others, adaptation and integration with people of target culture were the highest rated among others. An unexpected result was that there was no significant relationship between students' lesson scores and their attitude toward foreign language culture. This can be justified by globalization process by which "people of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society". Therefore learners who belong to a global English-speaking culture are ready to suspend disbelief about others and adopt new cultural aspects while respecting and maintaining their own culture.

Keywords: motivation, culture, intercultural competence, globalization, foreign language learning.

Introduction

What do we mean by cultural motivation and how is globalization affecting it as an important contributor in learning a foreign language? Culture is defined by Tyler (1881) as that complex which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. Generally speaking, we can define culture as people's life style. But how this life style of people can be a motivating factor for learning a foreign language? Today the most important goal of language learning is to facilitate a better communication and understanding among individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the study of culture in the classroom should aim at enhancing students' intercultural comprehension. The topic of teaching and learning culture has been a concern of many language educators and scholars. To them foreign language learning is foreign culture learning. Kramsch (1993) states: "Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is always in

the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.” (Cited in Thanasoulas, 2001)

Up to now two main perspectives have influenced the teaching of culture. One pertains to the transmission of factual, cultural information which consist in statistical information, that is, institutional structures and other aspects of the target civilization, highbrow information, i.e. , immersion in literature and the arts, and lowbrow information, which may focus on the customs, habits and folklore of everyday life. The other perspective, drawing upon cross- cultural psychology or anthropology, has been to embed culture within an interpretive framework and establish connections, namely, points of refrence or departure, between one’s own and the target country. (Kramersch, 1993: 24) According to Moore (1991), earlier models of culture learning focused on the surface level behavior, but did not look at the underlying value orientations, nor did it recognize the variability of behavior within the target culture community or the interaction of language and culture in the making of meaning. By contrast the more recent models see culture as dynamic and variable, i.e., it is constantly changing and meaning is continuously being constructed through human interaction and communication. (Paige et al., 2000)

Many, if not most, people think of culture as what is often called “high culture”— art, literature, music, and the like. Actually, the most important part of culture is internal and hidden... but governs the behavior foreigners encounter. This dimension of culture can be seen as an iceberg with the tip sticking above the water level of conscious awareness. By far the most significant part, however, is unconscious or below the water level of awareness and includes values and thought patterns. (Weaver, 1993: 157, cited in klillick & Poveda, 1997: 221)

Now the frontiers have opened and nations come closer to one another, and as mentioned by Albrow (1990) the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society (P. 9). But here the question is that now in the process of globalizing the world and its culture, do people share the same attitudes and beliefs regarding other ethnics and cultures? And how is globalization changing our understanding of students’ motivation to learn English?

According to (Dornyei and Csizer, 2005) globalization affects every aspect of our social life and the resulting exposure to intercultural contact has significant bearings on a host of issues, and particularly on people’s interethnic attitudes. Intercultural contact is also a key issue in second language acquisition for at least two reasons: On one hand, L2 proficiency, creates the medium of communication between members of different ethnolinguistic communities. On the other hand, interethnic contact influences shaping the learner’s attitudinal/ motivational disposition thus, intercultural contact is both a means and end in L2 studies. (ibid) Therefore, it is not the only way to look at motivation as presented by Gardner in Canada. Lamb (2004) found that aspects of instrumental and integrative motivation were combined in the learners’ developing “bicultural identities”. While learners saw themselves as connected to a global, English-speaking culture, they simultaneously maintained the aspects of the identity in which they firmly rooted local Indonesian culture. Consistent with the results of this study mentioned, Yashima (2009) found that many learners had “international posture”; they envisioned themselves as future members of an international community and saw English as the tool for gaining access to that community.

Method

This study aims to determine if students of Azad Ardestan University follow the same motivational framework and if that distance reduction among different cultures make these

learners more tolerant, more respectful and flexible to other cultures, i.e., more intercultural competence? Additionally how it may affect on their FL learning?

Intercultural competence is defined as a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself". (Fantini, 2006 cited in Sincrope, 2007: 1) Research on intercultural competence utilized assessments of individual attitudes, personalities, values and motives, usually through short self-reports surveys, or open-ended interviews. To determine the intercultural competence of the subjects of the study, researcher made use of the frameworks of European Multidimensional Models of Intercultural Competence by Byram (1997) and Risager (2007), in addition to, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993); and on this basis, similar questionnaires were developed.

Participants

The participants of the study were 48 students of Islamic Azad Ardestan University. They were all in the age range of 18-26 of both sexes, male and female. The students majored in architecture, civil engineering and food industry.

Instruments

A questionnaire designed by the researcher was used to collect data. It was composed of three sections. 1) 11 statements about cultural issues to be rated with a likert scale of agreement (based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which consists of six stages grouped into three ethnocentric stages and three ethno relative stages). 2) 10 rating questions with three frequency options (considering Byram & Risager Multidimensional Model of ICC which consists of 4 different behavioral dimensions; tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility, respect for otherness, interaction). 3) 5 open questions about their behavior and attitude. Moreover, class discussions and essay writings were employed to elicit the required information to help assessing different dimensions discussed in intercultural competence models.

Procedure

In the first session of the semester a brief explanation was given to students about the project; and some questions were given to them to elaborate on, just as a warm up. They were informed about the objectives of the research. They were asked to state their true and honest responses. During the academic semester, class discussions and essay writings were employed as a learning complement. Some topics were intentionally chosen to convey cultural issues and students' responses were monitored to interpret the data obtained from the open ended questionnaires. In the last day of the classes three questionnaires were administered and students were informed to ask for any clarifications they might have. In addition they were asked to elaborate on the open ended questions.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 depicts the mean and standard deviation values of the subject's final test scores and both rating questionnaires. The figures indicate a high degree of intercultural acceptance among subjects. The first questionnaire constructed based on Bennett's Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, obtained 40.61, with 11 items in which 5 assigned for "the most agreement" and 1 for "the most disagreement". Moreover, the second questionnaire driven from Byram & Risager's ICC Model, obtained 24.57 with 10 rating items in which 3 shows "agreement", 2 "neutral" and 1

“disagreement”. Again the mean value of the second questionnaire implies a high degree of intercultural understanding.

Table 1. *The Mean and SD Values of Test scores and Two Questionnaires*

| | Mean (SD) |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Questionnaire 1 | 40.61 (5.68) |
| Questionnaire 2 | 24.57 (2.88) |
| Final Test Scores | 15.61 (3.11) |

The first questionnaire is comprised of six stages, namely, denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration, that language learners go through during learning procedures or when encountering a foreign culture. Figure 1 indicates that lower scores belong to denial stage (statements 1 & 2, 2.94 and 2.34 respectively). This means subjects think it is not enjoyable to live in an environment with no relationship with other cultures or ethnic groups. In the same diagram the highest score belongs to statement 3 which states that “Being familiar with other cultures may increase our capabilities”. This means that subjects are interested in learning new lifestyles from foreigners to expand their horizons. The same thing is true with regard to the second stage, defense, item 4; 44.4% rated 4 for the statement “To help other cultures, it is necessary to be aware of their cultural capacities.” The third stage, minimization, which is represented by statement 5, obtained 3.97. Statements 6 & 7 representing acceptance stage scored 3.08, 3.94 respectively. With regard to adaptation stage, statement 8 “When encountering with other cultures, I change my behavior to be more compatible with them”, obtained 3.16; while statement 9 “I respect cultural differences because I believe it is possible to consider two or more cultural frames”, scored 3.55. This indicates that subjects don’t like to substitute other cultures with their own, but they just take some cultural elements and develop multicultural frames. Finally, in responding to integration stage (statements 10, 11 which scored 3.82 & 4 respectively), the subjects show great desires to experience, understand and interact with other cultures.

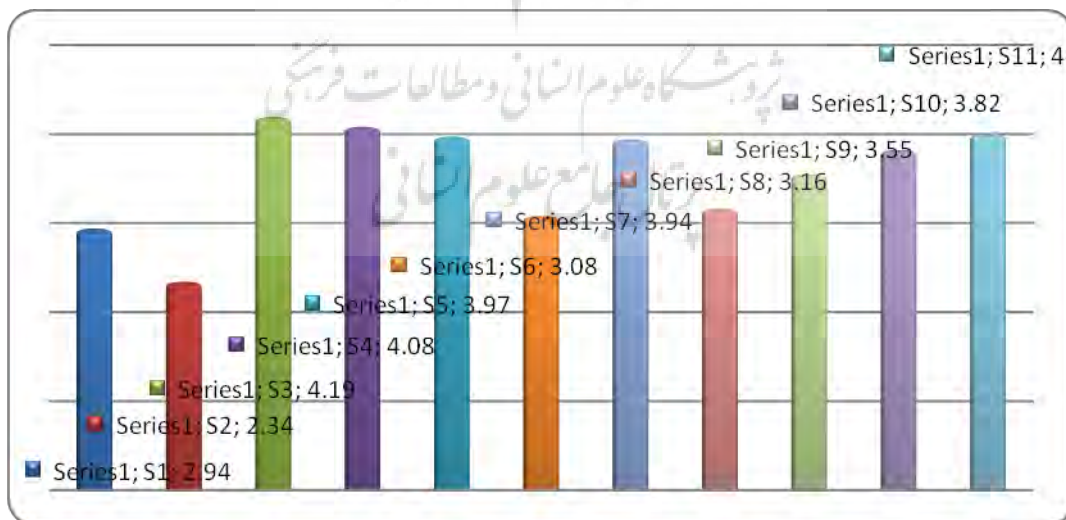


Figure 1. *Mean Values Regarding Questionnaire 1*

The second questionnaire consists of four elements reflecting language learning cultural competence. Table 2 illustrates the mean and standard deviation of these four contributors. Among them interaction received the highest mean score 10.60, and tolerance for ambiguity scored the lowest 3.61.

Table 2. Mean and SD Values Regarding the Four Contributors in Questionnaire 2

| | Mean (SD) |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Tolerance for Ambiguity | 3.61 (1.99) |
| Flexibility | 4.94 (1.16) |
| Respect | 5.38 (0.80) |
| Interaction | 10.60 (1.68) |

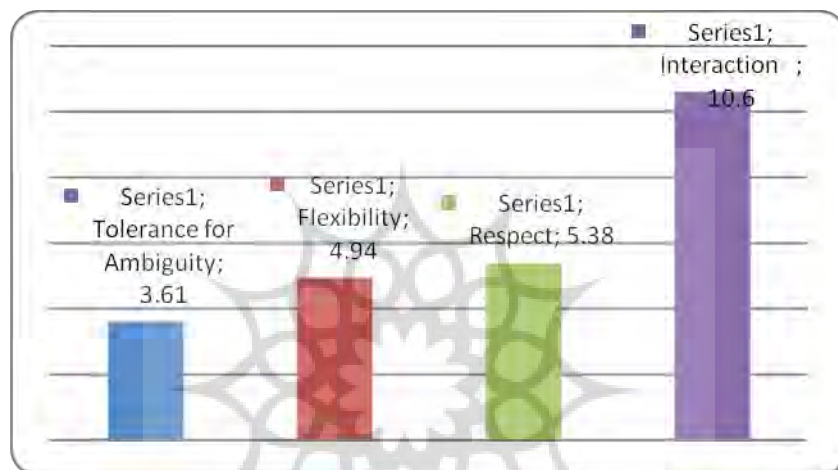


Figure 2. Comparing the Mean Values of the Four Contributors in Questionnaire 2

The information in figure 2 indicates that subjects are tolerant about the ambiguity of other cultures (items 1, 2), moreover; they are very flexible (items 3, 4) and respectful (items 5, 6) about foreigners. Finally, what is evident is that they are very willing to interact with the people of other cultures. (items 7, 8, 9, 10).

Considering table 3 many interesting findings were obtained. Regarding tolerance for ambiguity 58.3% chose disagreement in responding to statement 2 “I segregate from people with strange cultures”. As flexibility contributor statement 3 “I understand people’s beliefs and attitudes toward different religions and politics.” received 72.2% agreement. 88.9% agreement was reported for statement 5, “I always encourage others to respect other cultures”. At last, interaction with the highest general mean among others got 77.8% agreement for statement 8, “I like to communicate and make friends with the people of other cultures or ethnics”.

Table 3. Prriictttt t' Rsss es ooee siirrrrr r 2

| | Mean | Agree | Neutral | disagree |
|----------------|------|-------|---------|----------|
| S ₁ | 1.25 | 80.6 | 13.9 | 5.6 |
| S ₂ | 2.36 | 22.2 | 19.4 | 58.3 |
| S ₃ | 2.55 | 72.2 | 11.1 | 16.7 |
| S ₄ | 2.38 | 58.3 | 22.2 | 19.4 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|
| S ₅ | 2.83 | 88.9 | 5.6 | 5.6 |
| S ₆ | 2.55 | 61.1 | 33.3 | 5.6 |
| S ₇ | 2.61 | 69.4 | 22.2 | 8.3 |
| S ₈ | 2.63 | 77.8 | 8.3 | 13.9 |
| S ₉ | 2.69 | 75 | 19.4 | 5.6 |
| S ₁₀ | 2.68 | 72.2 | 19.4 | 5.6 |

Since the study was conducted to determine the relationship between cultural motivation and learners' success, the final test scores were correlated against the results of the first and second questionnaires. Table 4 & 5 depict the values of correlation coefficients, the square of the correlation coefficients and level of significance with regard to the first and second questionnaires respectively. The tables show no significant relationship between final test scores and two questionnaires. As discussed before during the academic semester, students were requested to express their views about intercultural relations through class discussions or writing essays.

Table 4. *Questionnaire 1 and Test Scores Correlation Coefficient*

| Correlation Coefficient | Correlation Coefficient Square | Significance Level |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 0.020 | 0.001 | 0.909 |
| P < 0.05 | | |

Table 5. *Questionnaire 2 and Test Scores Correlation Coefficient*

| Correlation Coefficient | Correlation Coefficient Square | Significance Level |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| -0.143 | 0.020 | 0.411 |
| P < 0.05 | | |

Consistent with the questionnaires results, the majority of the students agreed that they like to experience and interact with other cultures, they claim that they don't learn English just for academic or occupational requirements, but they like to learn English as an international language to become a part of the global world, and culture. Rejecting the relationship between students' success and their cultural competence can be interpreted by the social tendencies affected by globalization.

Another example for the idea of reinforcing intercultural comprehension through globalization is the claim by de Nooy & Hanna (2003). "There will always be conflicts and differences between native and target cultures, but intercultural comprehension allows learners to occupy a third place between the native and target cultures with understanding and tolerance for both. Instead of judging the target culture based on how different (or better or worse) it is from the native culture, learners avoid falling back on their native culture to interpret the target culture and understanding the value systems underlying the cultural differences between them".

The findings show that students are tolerant and respectful about the cultures they don't know; this can be explained by the term "world culture" which refers to the cultural complex of foundational assumptions, forms of knowledge and prescriptions for actions that underlie globalized flow (Boli, 1999). Concerning the results of the survey this "world culture" is

comprised of two or more cultural frames that students consider during acceptance or adaptation stage. As Wadell & Shandor (2012) state EFL learners develop “international identities” while simultaneously retaining their own cultures.

In the globalization process the world is becoming a single social and cultural setting (Tomlinson, 1991). Therefore, there are not many ambiguities to be tolerated. People don't deny the relationship among cultures but they defend intercultural interactions knowing that it can expand their horizons.

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