

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

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MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES OF POLISH STUDENTS LEARNING HEBREW

Limited studies have been carried out in Poland to investigate the motivation which is activated and maintained among Polish students learning Hebrew as their optional second language. The aim of this research was to examine the relationships among integrative and instrumental attitudes and motivation level (Gardner, 1985a) in two age groups of students learning Hebrew, using an 18-item questionnaire adapted from the AMTB (Gardner, 1985b). Contrary to expectations, gender and family ties did not significantly bias the motivation and attitudes in the sample investigated. Close relationships were found between age and integrative attitude and motivation intensity: older students had a more integrative attitude than younger students and experienced more intensive motivation.

Key words: language learning, second language motivation, language attitudes, Hebrew language

Introduction

The range of foreign language courses available in Poland has been significantly expanded over the last years. Among other languages, learning Hebrew has also become possible. Existing university studies in Hebrew philology are now supplemented by secondary school classes specializing in Hebrew. Moreover, young people participate in optional Hebrew courses both in secondary schools and at universities. In view of this changing educational situation it is interesting to consider young Polish people's motivation to learn Hebrew.

Motivation constitutes one of the most important factors influencing the process of second language acquisition. It affects not only the decision to start learning a language, but also the progress and effectiveness of learning itself. The question of motivation in the case of learning Hebrew in Poland seems particularly interesting when we take into account the long and complex history of Polish-Jewish relations. Moreover, to many Polish students Hebrew is an exotic language, generally considered difficult (because of the different alphabet) and spoken by about 6-8 million people living in a faraway country.

In the theory of second language acquisition, motivation is usually understood as a set of factors, including aspirations to reach certain goals through learning a language, willingness to undertake and sustain effort in order to achieve these goals, as well as the attitude toward the acquired language and communities that use it (Gardner, 1985a, 2001b; Klein, 1986; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). Wolfgang Klein (1986) indicates four factors constituting motivation to learn a foreign language: *social integration* (learning a language in order to be able to participate in the life of a community that speaks this language), *communicative needs* (the aim of learning a language – what we are going to use this language for), *attitude* (the subjective orientation towards the language we are learning and the people who use it) and *education* (learning foreign languages as part of an educational concept obligatory in a given society). The differentiation between social integration and communicative needs corresponds to the division proposed by Robert C. Gardner (Gardner, 1985a; Gardner, 2001b) into *integrative* and *instrumental attitudes*.

The *integrative attitude* is assumed to create a positive relation to the language being learned and to the society using this language. It means a person's desire not only to become a competent speaker but also to experience the culture connected with the language, to understand its various aspects, to meet people and interact with them, or even a willingness to join the life of their community. Such an attitude is also associated with aspiring to achieve not only a state of relative bilingualism, but also a state of relative biculturalism. Second language learners with an integrative attitude try to turn the second language and culture into an element of their own identity formation (Gardner, 1985a, 2001a; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005).

Another variant of motivational attitude is the *instrumental attitude*. In this case the second language and its culture are treated more as a tool helping to achieve personal goals, such as getting an attractive job, enhancing one's chances on the job market or improving one's social status thanks to better education or gaining extra skills. Second language learning is often accompanied by this type of attitude because knowledge of foreign languages is also useful in solving various practical problems, such as gaining access to specialist literature or coping during a visit to a foreign country where not everyone knows other languages (Gardner, 1985a, 2001b; Riemer, 2003).

Both these attitudes undoubtedly coexist. Learners with a predominant integrative attitude need foreign language skills for solving practical problems as

Table 1. Demographic data

		Secondary school students	University students	Total
N		35	32	67
Mean age		17;3	22;4	19;8
Gender	Male (N)	19	13	32
	Female (N)	16	19	35
Jewish/Israeli family relationships (N)		6	5	11
Mean time of learning Hebrew (number of semesters)		3.8	3.2	3.5

well, while learners with a predominant instrumental attitude would not be able to achieve their goals without understanding cultural issues and without getting closer to the second language community. One of these attitudes frequently assumes a predominant form. However, as some studies suggest, both can have an important impact on second language learning (e.g., Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Husseinali, 2006; Humphreys & Spratt, 2008).

Another question is the intensity (power) of motivation. The factors mentioned earlier that shape motivation, can appear with different potency levels, and both the forms and the intensity of motivation depend on various individual variables like family relationships with second language users, personal experience, the impact of social environments etc. (see e.g., Noels, 2001; Dörnyei, 2005, Chapter 4, pp. 65-119).

The questionnaire survey reported here aimed to establish what motivational attitudes dominate among Polish learners of Hebrew. The study concentrates on the three aforementioned factors and tries to answer a few questions connected with the social-psychological approach: whether the motivation of Polish students learning Hebrew is more integrative or instrumental, whether family ties with the Jewish and/or Israeli community and culture as well as age and gender influence the type and intensity of their motivation to learn this language.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 35 (19 male and 16 female) students from two secondary schools in Warsaw, ranging in age from 17 to 19 years, and 32 (13 male and 19 female) students from the University of Warsaw, ranging in age from 21 to 23 years. They all took Hebrew as an additional second language (beside obligatory English). Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic characteristics. The two groups are similar as regards the duration of their Hebrew learning experience.

Materials and procedure

Data were collected from the respondents using a questionnaire adapted for this study (by the third author) from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985b). Three AMTB scales were selected: integrative attitude, instrumental attitude and motivation intensity. The questionnaire contained 18 items in two parts: Part A with 8 items and the 7-point Likert scale and Part B with 10 items and three high-, middle- and low-level answers to choose from. The latent variables that were investigated are as follows:

Part A

- (1) *Integrative attitude* (4 statements) – interest in learning Hebrew in order to interact, meet and socialize with members of Hebrew language communities. Example: “Learning Hebrew is important to me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the Israeli way of life.”
- (2) *Instrumental attitude* (4 statements) – interest in learning Hebrew in order to achieve utilitarian benefits such as better jobs or higher social status. Example: “Learning Hebrew is important to me because knowledge of this language could enhance my chances on the job market.”

Part B

- (2) *Motivational intensity* (10 statements) – persistence in language study, learning behaviors and cultural contacts. Example: “If Hebrew were not taught in my school, I would: (a) learn Hebrew by myself (using a teach yourself manual, via the Internet, etc); (b) not bother learning Hebrew at all; (c) try to obtain lessons in Hebrew somewhere else.”

Students participated in this study voluntarily and were informed that the information they gave would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. The questionnaires were filled in anonymously during class time and the respondents were given as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire.

Results

The independent variables considered in the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data were: age, gender, and family relationships with Jewish and/or Israeli communities (“I have Jewish ancestors” and/or “I have relatives in Israel”).

The data obtained from the questionnaire met the conditions of normality of distributions and homogeneity of variance, so they could be analyzed using parametric procedures.

In the first stage of the analysis, latent dimensions were computed and measured by Cronbach’s Alpha. These reliability coefficients ranged from 0.78 to 0.89 and reached an acceptable level (*integrative attitude* – 0.89, *instrumental attitude* – 0.78, *motivation intensity* – 0.86).

Table 2. The comparison of secondary school and university students' scores

Questionnaire scales	Secondary school students		University students		F(1,59)	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Integrative Attitude	4.14	1.63	5.79	0.72	10.562	0.002
Instrumental Attitude	4.62	1.50	4.58	1.30	0.397	0.531
Motivation Intensity	1.89	0.51	2.42	0.27	13.817	0.000

The next stage of the analysis concerned the power of motivation. The analysis with the one sample t-test indicates that the mean level of motivation intensity ($M = 2.14$, $SD = 0.49$) was significantly higher than the average value ($\mu = 2$, $t(66) = 2.410$, $p = 0.019$). The assessment of motivation intensity in both respondent groups shows a considerable age-related variation between them: the level of motivation intensity in secondary school students ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.51$) does not differ from the average ($\mu = 2$, $t(34) = -1.229$, $p = 0.227$), while the mean level for university students ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.27$) is significantly higher than the average level ($\mu = 2$, $t(31) = 8.665$, $p < 0.001$).

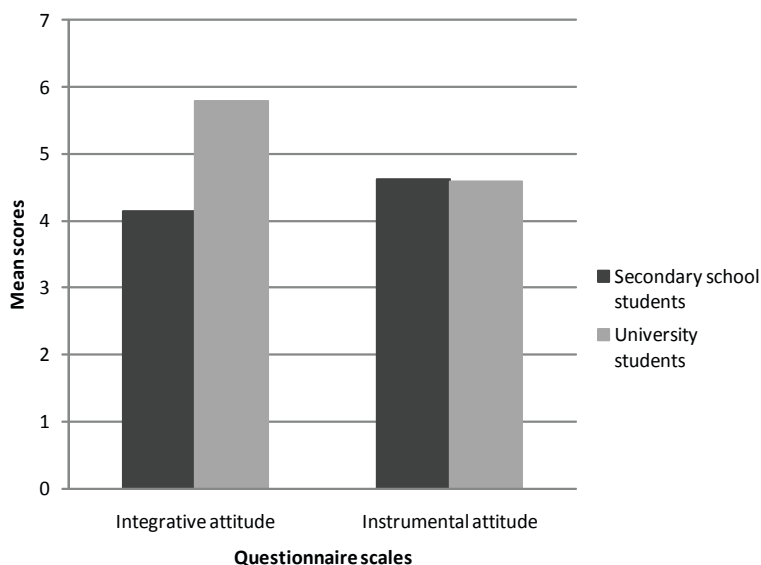
Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the three questionnaire scales and a comparison of the age groups' scores using the one way analysis of variance.

As for the age-related variations, university students of Hebrew showed significantly higher scores of integrative attitude and motivation intensity scales than secondary school students. In the case of the instrumental attitude scale the difference is not statistically significant (see Table 2). There were no significant main and interaction effects of gender and family relationships in the analysis of all three questionnaire scales.

The relation between integrative and instrumental attitudes in both age groups was analyzed using the one way univariate repeated measures ANOVA. The results of the within-group comparison show considerable attitude differences between the age groups. In the secondary school group the instrumental scale scores were significantly higher than the integrative scale scores ($F(1,34) = 5.687$, $p = 0.023$). In the university student group, on the other hand, the instrumental scale scores were significantly outnumbered by the integrative scale scores ($F(1,31) = 30.139$, $p < 0.001$). The relations between integrative and instrumental attitudes in both groups are shown in Figure 1.

In order to determine which attitudinal scale acts as a predictor of a student's motivation intensity, a hierarchical regression analysis was carried out, where the integrative attitude variable was entered in the first step and the instrumental attitude in the second step. The regression analysis shows that the integrative attitude allows to predict the level of motivation intensity in a substantial way, as indicated by the

Figure 1. Mean secondary school and university students' scores on integrative attitude and instrumental attitude scales



R^2 change (in the secondary school student group: R^2 change = 0.582, $p < 0.001$; in the university student group: R^2 change = 0.231, $p < 0.005$). The integrative attitude is also a significantly stronger predictor than instrumental attitude (in the secondary school student group: for integrative attitude $\beta = 0.571$, $p < 0.001$, and for instrumental attitude $\beta = 0.231$, $p = 0.088$; in the university student group: for integrative attitude $\beta = 0.531$, $p < 0.005$, and for instrumental attitude $\beta = -0.144$, $p = 0.410$).

Discussion

This study on Polish students learning Hebrew found that the level of motivation intensity was significantly high, especially in the case of university students.

One could have expected that persons having family ties with the Jewish and/or Israeli culture and community would display a stronger integrative attitude with a higher level of motivation than other students. Contrary to these expectation, there was no difference between both family relationship groups with respect to the integrative and instrumental attitudes and the level of motivation intensity. This indicates that starting and continuing to learn Hebrew in this sample of respondents, although determined by a wish to have direct contacts with the community using this language and to get to know the culture, literature and customs, is not dependent on family relationships.

There have been previous studies indicating that students' gender has a major influence on the motivation level and motivational attitudes. For example, Scott Kissau investigated gender differences in learners' motivation to learn a second language and found that societal perceptions were influential in overriding the positive attitudes of boys. In Kissau's study male students had significantly lower scores on the majority of the motivational variables (Kissau, 2006). Susan Baker and Peter MacIntyre (2000) and MacIntyre et al. (2002) also examined the role of gender with respect to these variables. Their findings support those of earlier studies (e.g., Gardner, 1985a) which uncovered more favorable attitudes and motivation among female language learners. Gender differences were also examined in the present study, but the earlier findings were not confirmed. Possibly, the specificity of the Hebrew language was decisive here (the ancient and rich Jewish cultural heritage, social issues connected with the fate of Jewish communities in Poland and Europe, as well as the perception of the Israeli language and culture as exotic). The aforementioned earlier findings concerned languages with a completely different international status (English and French).

In many previous studies of motivation in second language acquisition it was found that another variable having an important influence on motivational factors is the age of learners of various languages in various countries (e.g., Gömleksiz, 2001; MacIntyre et al., 2002; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2005; Figueiredo & Silva, 2008; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Wong, 2008). These findings are also confirmed in our study. Age turned out to be a factor with a considerable influence both on the level of motivation intensity and on the integrative attitudes. The relations between age and attitudes are presented in Figure 1. The level of instrumental attitudes (meaning the beliefs and expectations toward the usefulness of learning Hebrew) is average and almost identical in both age groups. By contrast, significant differences are visible on the side of integrative attitude which is significantly higher for university students. Similarly, the level of motivation intensity is significantly higher in the group of older students. This is probably related to greater knowledge, more extensive cultural contacts, and socio-cultural interests.

The results of our investigation also confirm the relationship between an integrative attitude and the level of motivation intensity – this relationship is significantly stronger than between motivation intensity and instrumental attitude. This finding concurs with many previous studies (e.g., Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Gardner, 2007). It shows that the factors that most strongly affect motivation to learn a second language are openness to and interest in the community using this language, as well as the culture, customs or geographical/tourist attractiveness.

The main limitation of this study is that the research is narrow in scope. Therefore, a further possible extension of research on language learning motivation should include more motivational factors, such as cultural interests, general attitudes to foreign languages, the impact of the social environment, attitudes to learning behaviors, or language use anxiety. Another possible extension of this study could also involve participants from other regions and places.

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