

A process model of L2 learners' motivation: From the perspectives of general tendency and individual differences

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine a process model of L2 learners' motivation. To investigate the overall process of motivation, the motivation of 148 university students was analyzed. Data were collected on three variables from the pre-decisional phase of motivation (i.e., value, expectancy, and intention) and four variables from the post-decisional phase of motivation (i.e., selective attention, emotion control, motivation control, and coping with failure). Both structural equation modeling (SEM) and cluster analysis were used in order to examine the learners' motivational process from the perspectives of general tendency and individual differences.

The results showed that subjective estimates of value and expectancy mediate behavioral intention and, in turn, affect motivational maintenance and control during the enactment of the intention. Furthermore, more detailed analysis focusing on individual differences revealed the possibility that concrete implementation of actions might be promoted if subjective value and intention are high, even if expectancy for success is low. These results suggest that a process model of motivation will be a useful research framework for uncovering various motivational processes of L2 learners.

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1. Introduction

Learner motivation is considered to affect the success of learning, not only in the case of second/foreign language (henceforth abbreviated only to L2) instruction, but throughout all aspects of educational activities. Since both practitioners and researchers have a considerable interest in motivation, numerous studies have been conducted thus far (for reviews, see [Dörnyei \(2001, 2005\)](#), [Dörnyei and Schmidt \(2001\)](#), and [Oxford \(1996\)](#)). One of the common features of these recent studies is the examination of how motivation affects the concrete learning process within a particular classroom context, i.e., the move towards a more process-oriented approach to the study of motivation ([Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998](#); [Ushioda, 1994, 1996](#); [Williams and Burden, 1997](#)).

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For example, Williams and Burden (1997) separate the motivational process into three stages along a continuum: reasons for doing something → deciding to do something → sustaining the effort, or persisting. They argue that the first two stages involve initiating motivation, whereas the third stage involves sustaining motivation, and these two aspects of motivation should be clearly differentiated. Dörnyei and Ottó also put forward an elaborate model of the situation-specific aspect of motivation (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998). Their model separates the motivational process into three distinct phases: pre-actional phase (corresponding to “choice motivation” that precedes the launching of action) → actional phase (corresponding to “executive motivation” that energizes the concrete action) → post-actional phase (corresponding to “motivational retrospection” that involves critical reflection). Each phase is assumed to be closely related to the others and to portray motivational processes as they happen in real time.

As Dörnyei (2001) states, the two conceptualizations mentioned above are not without antecedents in psychological literature. In particular, one of the most important impacts has come from the work of the German psychologists Heckhausen and Kuhl (Heckhausen, 1991; Heckhausen and Kuhl, 1985). They constructed a process model of motivation which assumed that there are distinct temporally ordered phases within the motivational process, namely, the pre-decisional phase of motivation and the post-decisional phase of motivation. A schematic representation of their model can be represented in Fig. 1.

The pre-decisional phase, which can be seen as the decision-making stage of motivation, involves complex planning and goal-setting processes during which initial values and expectancies of a task are articulated and evaluated in terms of their desirability and chance of fulfillment, and subsequently intentions are formed. This phase can be considered as “motivation” in the narrow sense (Heckhausen, 1991). On the other hand, the post-decisional phase, which is the implementational stage of motivation, involves motivational maintenance and control mechanisms during the enactment of the intention that determine action initiation and perseverance, and that help to overcome various internal obstacles to action. In order to maintain and sustain the intention until it is fulfilled, various action control strategies (Kuhl, 1987) are said to be used, such as “selective attention” (intentionally ignoring attractive alternatives or irrelevant aspects), “emotion control” (inhibiting emotional states that may undermine the enacting and protection of the intention), “motivation control” (enhancing the strength of the motivation tendency on which the intention is based), and “coping with failure” (not pondering failure for too long and detaching oneself from the unattained goal). In relation to “motivation,” this phase can be considered as “action” or “volition” (Heckhausen, 1991) since it involves concrete implementation of actions appropriate to the attainment of a goal chosen in the pre-decisional phase.

As has been described above, the defining of motivation on the basis of two phases provides a beneficial viewpoint in terms of providing more effective learning guidance. This is because the form of necessary educational intervention differs depending on which of the two phases a student is in. For example, in the case he/she is unable to form an intention, the teacher is required to have the student set a suitable goal and support the formation of an intention that enables that goal to be achieved. In other words, the support required here relates to “qualitative” aspects in the form of a goal or objective of behavior. On the other hand, in the case he/she is unable to implement an intention, the teacher is required to support the pursuit of concrete behavior so as to achieve the goal set by the student. In other words, the support required here relates to “quantitative” aspects in the form of the intensity of actual behavior (such as the amount of study time). In this manner, by defining motivation in terms of a process-oriented view, it becomes possible to obtain a perspective for providing more suitable learning guidance corresponding to the actual state of students.

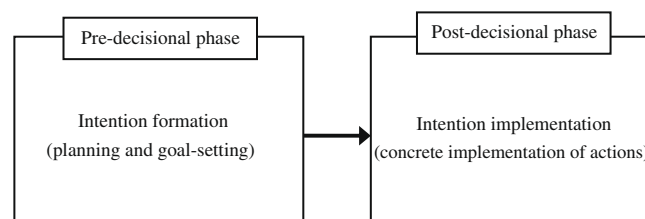


Fig. 1. Schematic representation of a process model of motivation.

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