

Orientation, Motivation and Attitudes of Turkish University Students Learning a Second Foreign Language

Güray König

1. Theoretical background

The social-psychological implications of second or foreign language acquisition have been discussed from different perspectives for many years. The question whether studying a second or foreign language causes a difference in the behavior and attitudes of the learners is important in the level of proficiency attained as well. Born (1977: 11; cited in Gardner 1985: 1) states:

We propose to treat language as a whole: its nature, its history, its relationship to culture, the acquisition of it, the immediate uses to which it can be put, and the development in our students of an appreciation for the gift of tongues.

According to Gardner, this type of orientation tends to remove second language study from the purely educational realm, and instead places it at the centre of 'social psychology'. He (1985: 146) stresses the idea that languages are unlike any other subject taught in a classroom in that they involve the acquisition of skills or behavior patterns which are characteristic of another culture. As a consequence, the relative degree of success will be influenced to some extent by the individual's attitudes toward the other community or to other communities in general as well as by the beliefs in the community which are relevant to the language learning process.

Gardner (1985: 146-7) focuses on four classes of variables in the Socio-Educational Model that he proposed in 1979 and modified several times up to 1985: the social milieu, individual differences, language acquisition contexts, and outcomes. The language acquisition process is viewed as involving a particular causal interplay of these four types of variables. The variable of individual differences comprises intelligence, language aptitude, motivation, and situational anxiety.

Motivation is the focus of this study. The concept of motivation is a multi-faceted construct which involves effort (motivational intensity), cognitions (desire), affect (attitude), and goal. According to Gardner, attitudes involving other ethnic groups and the language learning situation underlie motivation. For this reason, attitudes are not depicted in the model as they are seen as determinants of motivation. According to Ajzen (1988; cited in Baker, 1992: 11), "an attitude is a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event." Moreover, motivation is seen to be goal-directed, and the goal is to learn the language. One might ask why individuals have this goal, i.e. what is their orientation. (Gardner, 1985: 11). Orientation is defined as a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language. Orientation is divided into two facets, namely instrumental and integrative. Instrumental orientation might involve language learning for vocational reasons, status achievement, personal success, self-enhancement, self-actualization, etc. Integrative orientation, on the other hand, is social and interpersonal in nature, and may reflect a desire to be like representative members of the other language community (Gardner and Lambert, 1972:14; cited in Baker 1992: 32).

Within this framework, attitudes, motivation and orientation of second foreign language learners in Turkey are investigated in this study.

-2-

2. Research Questions:

1. What is the orientation of second foreign language learners?
2. What is the motivation of second foreign language learners?
3. What is the attitude of second foreign language learners toward the second foreign language and the native speakers of the language they are learning?

3. Background information

Learning English has become increasingly popular in Turkey over the past 50 years. There is a great demand to learn English both in formal educational institutions and in community courses. English instruction starts at the early stages of education. Although it is not a compulsory subject in state schools, almost 95% of the students elect English as a foreign language. Different types of high school are available after eight years of basic education in Turkey. Regular state high schools offer elective foreign language courses. Anatolian high schools accept students through an entrance exam and offer a compulsory one-year intensive English program to prepare the students for instruction in English in some subjects. Super high schools, to which acceptance is granted on the basis of high academic achievement, offer an English preparatory year as well. Private high schools, which are subject to tuition fees, have an intensive English year with instruction in English in some subjects in the following years. Vocational high schools offer elective foreign language courses among which English is as popular as it is in the others.

Among Turkish students, there is great desire to enter university; acceptance to university is subject to a central state entrance exam. The medium of instruction is Turkish in most state universities, but in recent years there has been an increasing tendency in some disciplines of state universities to have preparatory years in English, especially in areas which are very popular, such as engineering, international relations, public relations, economics, business administration, tourism, Western languages and literatures and medicine. After a prior English preparatory year, instruction is offered in English in most private universities with a prior English preparatory year.

In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for learning a second foreign language besides English at the university level, and more and more students from different disciplines take elective foreign language courses. As these courses have limited quotas, many university students attend private courses in the second foreign language. The most popular foreign languages are German, Spanish, Italian, French, Russian and Arabic.

-3-

4. Method

This exploratory study is descriptive and qualitative with the aim of understanding the attitudes, motivation and orientation of second foreign language learners. The informants were 39 undergraduate or graduate students, native speakers of Turkish from different universities in Ankara who voluntarily took a second foreign language course. Their ages ranged between 18 and 28 years. Six students were at the upper-intermediate, and 33 were at the advanced level of proficiency in English (self-report). The second foreign languages voluntarily learned were:

German (10 students)
 French (10 students)
 Italian (9 students)
 Spanish (10 students).

The proficiency level in the second foreign language learned was as follows: 24 beginners and 15 elementary level. The departments of the informants in university can be listed as follows:

Sciences 9
 Medicine 1
 Social Sciences 15
 Law 1
 Languages and Literatures 13

Most departments in these disciplines are English-medium. Nearly all informants were from the state universities in Ankara (37 from state universities, 2 from private universities). The high school background of the students was diverse, with the majority coming from high schools in which an English preparatory year is obligatory. 29 informants were females, 10 were males.

The questionnaire is designed in two parts in the following order:

1. questions designed to elicit demographic information;
2. exploratory questions designed to elicit the following information concerning the learners: orientation, integrative and instrumental motivation, desire to learn the language, motivational intensity, attitudes, interest

in foreign languages, attitudes toward the native speakers of the second foreign language learned.

The questionnaire is made up of two complementary sections:

1. Questions requiring open- or closed-ended responses;
2. Questions adapted from Gardner's (1985: 177-184) Motivation/Attitude Test Battery (closed-ended responses) The first part of the questionnaire with open-ended or closed-ended responses was administered first of all while the second part (adapted from Gardner's Test Battery) was given after the first part had been collected.

5.0 Findings and Discussion

5.1 Orientation

A. General orientation (open-ended questions)

1. *What are your reasons for learning a second foreign language?*

The answers given to this question indicate that the students want to learn the second foreign language for professional reasons, either to get a job or to get a better position in the first place. Secondly, they say that they learn it as a hobby. The reasons are listed as follows: self-enhancement, for graduate studies either in Turkey or abroad, to live abroad, because it is a European language, for status, because it is very close to the first foreign language learned, etc.

-4-

2. *Do you learn a second foreign language because you enjoy learning it, or in order to realize your objectives?*

As an answer to this question, 30 informants stated that they learned it in order to realize certain objectives and as a hobby at the same time. Four said that they learned it as a hobby, five said that they learned it to realize their objectives in life.

3. *Would you like to live in the country in which the language you are learning is used as a native language?*

23 informants said that they would like to live in that country temporarily, 14 answered this question in the positive, and only two informants answered in the negative. This tendency shows that university students are interested either in living in a foreign country or to be there at least temporarily.

B. Integrative and Instrumental Orientation (adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery)

Integrative Orientation:

1. *Studying German/French/Italian/Spanish can be important for me, because:*

- a. *It will allow me to be more at ease with the Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish.*
- b. *It will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.*
- c. *It will allow me to better understand and appreciate German/French/Italian/Spanish art and literature.*
- d. *I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups.*

The informants were allowed to mark more than one choice in this part. A total of 79 alternatives were marked as follows: a. 19, b. 30, c. 13, d. 17.

Instrumental Orientation:

2. *Studying German/French/Italian/Spanish can be important for me because:*

- a. *I'll need it for my future career.*
- b. *It will make me a more knowledgeable person.*

c. *I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job.*

d. *Other people will respect me more if I have a knowledge of a foreign language.*

96 items were marked in this part as the informants were allowed to mark more than one alternative as follows: a. 34, b. 21, c. 25, d. 16.

When the integrative and instrumental orientations are compared, it may be seen that the instrumental orientation seems to dominate over the integrative one. Parallel to the answers given to the open-ended questions regarding the orientation of the informants, the students report that they learn a second foreign language in order to get a job or a better position in their career.

5.2 Motivation

A. Desire to learn the second foreign language (adapted from Gardner, 1985: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery):

During German/French/Italian/Spanish class, I would like:

a. *to have a combination of Turkish and German/French/Italian/Spanish spoken.*

b. *to have as much German/French/Italian/Spanish as possible spoken.*

c. *to have only German/French/Italian/Spanish spoken.*

25 informants chose "b" in this part, which indicates that they enjoy speaking the language they are learning. Eight informants prefer to use a combination of Turkish and the foreign language they are learning and six prefer to have only the foreign language used in class.

If I had the opportunity to speak German/French/Italian/Spanish outside of school, I would:

a. *never speak it.*

b. *speak German/French/Italian/Spanish most of the time, using Turkish only if really necessary.*

c. *speak it occasionally using Turkish whenever possible.*

31 informants chose "b" in this part, eight chose "c", nobody chose "a". This shows that the informants are eager to use the language outside the classroom.

Compared to my other courses, I like German/French/Italian/Spanish:

a. *the most.*

b. *the same as all the others.*

c. *least of all.*

The items "a" and "b" were chosen at equal numbers (17 and 17) in this part, showing that they enjoy the learning process. Five informants chose the "c" alternative.

I find studying German/French/Italian/Spanish:

a. *not interesting at all.*

b. *no more interesting than other subjects.*

c. *very interesting.*

30 informants chose "c" in this part indicating that they find studying the second foreign language very interesting. Eight informants chose alternative "b" and only one informant said that he/she did not find studying the foreign language interesting.

If there were German/French/Italian/Spanish speaking families in my neighborhood, I would:

- a. never speak German/French/Italian/Spanish with them.
- b. speak German/French/Italian/Spanish with them sometimes.
- c. speak German/French/Italian/Spanish with them as much as possible.

29 informants chose alternative "c" and 10 chose "b" while none of the informants chose alternative "a". This tendency shows that they are eager to use the language outside the classroom as well.

If I had the opportunity and knew enough German/French/Italian/Spanish, I would read German/ French/ Italian/ Spanish magazines and newspapers:

- a. as often as I could.
- b. never.
- c. not very often.

34 informants chose "a" and no informants chose "c", which indicates that they would like to read in the language they are learning.

-6-

B. Motivational Intensity (adapted from Gardner, 1985: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery):

I actively think about what I have learned in my German/French/Italian/Spanish class:

- a. very frequently.
- b. hardly ever.
- c. once in a while.

25 informants stated that they thought about what they had learned in their foreign language class once in a while, 14 said that they thought about it very frequently; nobody chose the second alternative "hardly ever".

When I have a problem understanding something we are learning in the German/French/Italian/Spanish class, I:

- a. immediately ask the teacher for help.
- b. only seek help before the exam.
- c. just forget about it.

32 informants marked the first alternative in this part, only three choosing "b" and four choosing "c".

When it comes to German/French/Italian/Spanish homework, I:

- a. put some effort into it, but not as much as I could.
- b. work very carefully, making sure I understand everything.
- c. skim over it.

24 informants chose the "b" alternative and 12 "a", which indicates that they take their studies seriously. Only two chose c.

Considering how I study German/French/Italian/Spanish, I can honestly say that I:

- a. do just enough work to get along.
- b. will pass on the basis of sheer luck or intelligence because I do very little work.
- c. really try to learn German/French/Italian/Spanish.

Interestingly, 25 informants chose the "a" alternative in this part, while only 13 informants said they really tried to learn the foreign language. However, nobody chose the "b" alternative, which shows that they put an effort into their studies.

If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra German/French/Italian/Spanish assignment, I would:

- a. *definitely not volunteer.*
- b. *definitely volunteer.*
- c. *only do it if the teacher asked me directly.*

23 informants chose the "c" alternative, which is surprising as it does not agree with the answers given to the previous questions. Eight informants chose "b", and seven the "a" alternative.

After I get my German/French/Italian/Spanish assignment back, I:

- a. *always write them, correcting my mistakes.*
- b. *just throw them in my desk and forget them.*
- c. *I look them over, but don't bother correcting mistakes.*

21 informants chose "c"; 15 chose the "a" alternative. Only two informants marked the alternative "b", which indicates again that they take their studies seriously.

When I'm in German/French/Italian/Spanish class, I:

- a. *volunteer answers as much as possible.*
- b. *answer only the easier questions.*
- c. *never say anything.*

Only three informants marked the "c" alternative while 21 marked "a" and 14 marked "b", which indicates that they want to participate in the language learning activities as much as possible.

-7-

C. Motivation (open-ended questions)

1. How does English influence the learning process of the second foreign language?

28 informants said that they learned it more easily, eight said that it did not make a difference, and only three said that they learned it with more difficulty. The responses indicate that English, the first foreign language they had learned, had a positive influence on the second foreign language learning process in general.

2. What level of proficiency do you plan to reach in your second foreign language?

31 informants said that they wanted to reach the advanced level of proficiency in the second foreign language, eight the upper-intermediate level. The answers indicate that they want to reach higher levels of proficiency.

3. How would you describe a person who voluntarily learns a second foreign language?

As an answer to this question, 35 informants said that they described such a person as "motivated;" 18 as "hard-working;" seven as "social;" six as "agreeable" and "open-minded;" five as "modern" and "well-informed." The other attributes cited are as follows: "enterprising," "talented," "intelligent," "amusing," "active," "self-confident," "successful," etc., which are all positive personal qualities.

4. Is the knowledge of a second foreign language necessary to be successful in Turkey? (The following alternatives were given in this question.)

- a. *Yes*

b. Often

c. Sometimes

d. No

22 informants answered this question in the affirmative and only one informant in the negative. 10 chose "b" and six "c". The answers indicate that most informants believe that the knowledge of a second foreign language is necessary to be successful in Turkey.

-8-

5.3 Attitudes

The alternatives given under the parts A and B are as follows:

a. I agree

b. I agree partly

c. I don't agree

A. Interest in foreign languages (Adapted from Gardner, 1985: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery)

1. *If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be able to speak the language of the people.*

34 informants agreed with this statement, four agreed partly, while no informants said that they did not agree.

2. *I wish I could speak another language perfectly.*

While 36 informants agreed with this statement, two agreed partly.

3. *I want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation.*

24 informants agreed with this statement, 10 agreed partly and only four did not agree.

4. *I would really like to learn a lot of foreign languages.*

While 28 informants agreed with this statement, only three did not; seven informants agreed partly.

5. *If I planned to stay in another country, I would make a great effort to learn the language even though I could get along in English.*

30 informants agreed with this statement, four agreed partly and four did not agree.

6. *I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages.*

While 33 informants agreed with this statement, four agreed partly and only one informant did not agree.

7. *Studying a foreign language is an enjoyable experience.*

While 33 informants considered studying a foreign language an enjoyable experience no informants said the contrary. Five informants said that they agreed with this statement only partly.

In general, it can be said that the informants have a positive attitude towards foreign language learning. However, as can be seen from the number of the answers given, a few informants chose not to answer the questions in this section.

-9-

B. Attitudes toward the Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish (adapted from Gardner, 1985: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery:)

1. *The Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish are considerate of the feelings of others.*

While only four informants agreed with this statement, 19 agreed partly and 12 did not agree.

2. *Germans/French people/Italians/Spanish people are trustworthy and dependable.*

23 informants partly agreed with this statement; three agreed while six did not agree.

3. *I have always admired Germans/French people/Italians/Spanish people.*

20 informants agreed with this statement partly while four agreed and nine did not.

4. *Germans/French people/Italians/Spanish people are very friendly and hospitable.*

14 informants agreed partly, 12 did not agree, and only four agreed with this statement.

5. *I would like to get to know German/French Italian/Spanish people better.*

27 informants agreed, five agreed partly and three did not agree with this statement.

6. *The Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish are a very kind and generous people.*

Four informants agreed, 7 did not agree and 22 agreed partly with this statement.

7. *I have a favorable attitude toward the Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish.*

15 informants agreed, 17 agreed partly and three did not agree with this statement.

8. *The more I learn about the Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish, the more I like them.*

While six informants agreed with this statement, only four did not agree and 23 agreed partly.

9. *The Germans/the French/Italians/the Spanish are cheerful, agreeable and good humored.*

17 informants agreed with this statement partly, nine agreed and six did not agree.

In summary, informants agree with the positive statements given only partly. While they have a strong motivation to learn the second foreign language, their attitudes towards the native speakers of these languages are not very positive. As can be seen from the total number responses given, several informants chose not to answer the questions in this section as in the former section.

C. Attitudes toward German/French/Italian/Spanish people. (open-ended question)

1. *How would you describe the native speakers of the language you are learning?*

Very different attributes were elicited in this section, such as "hard-working" (12), "kind" (7), "fortunate" (6), "friendly" (5), "honest," "successful," "active" (4), "happy," "agreeable," and "motivated" (3). Most of the attributes given are positive; however, a few negative attributes, such as "rigid," "cold," "rude," and "unfriendly" were cited as well. Out of the total 28 attributes supplied only four were negative, all others were positive.

6.0 Conclusion

The conclusions of the study can be summarized in terms of the orientation, motivation and attitudes displayed by the second foreign language learners in this exploratory study.

Orientation: The informants' instrumental orientation is very strong. They learn a second foreign language in order to get a job, to get a better position, for graduate studies either at home or abroad, or to realize objectives in life. The integrative orientation seems to take a secondary place in learning a second foreign language. The informants indicate that they learn the language to meet and converse with more and varied people, to better understand and appreciate German/French/Spanish/Italian art and literature, etc.

Motivation: The motivation to learn the second foreign language is very high in general. The informants report that they enjoy learning the second foreign language and would like to use it both in the classroom and

outside. They think that English has had a positive effect on learning the second foreign language. They plan to reach an advanced level of proficiency in the second foreign language. They describe a person who voluntarily learns a second foreign language as being motivated, hard-working, social, open-minded, etc. which are all positive personality attributes. They consider the knowledge of a second foreign language necessary to be successful in professional life in Turkey.

Motivational intensity is quite high, however, not as high as the general motivation.

Attitudes: Attitudes have been investigated under two headings:

1. Interest in foreign languages in general: Interest in foreign languages is very high. They want to learn a lot of languages, want to speak another language perfectly, and they consider studying a foreign language an enjoyable experience, etc.
2. Attitudes towards the speakers of the second foreign language learned: Attitudes towards the speakers of the second foreign language learned seem to be neutral in general. They partly agree with the positive statements given. However, in general they describe them with positive personality traits such as "hard-working," "kind," "fortunate," "friendly," "successful," "honest," "active," etc.

The answers given to the open-ended questions and Gardner's Test Battery have been found to complement one another. In other words, there is a parallelism in terms of the reactions between the two sections of the questionnaire.

This is a small-scale preliminary study with a social-psychological approach to second foreign language acquisition in Turkey. Further studies with broader qualitative and a quantitative perspectives should be undertaken in order to reach sound results regarding the social-psychological aspects of second foreign language learning in Turkey.

References

Baker, C. (1992). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Gardner, R.C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning. The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.

Copyright © 2006 *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*

König, Güray. (2006). Orientation, Motivation and Attitudes of Turkish University Students Learning a Second Foreign Language.

Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht [Online], 11 (1), 10 pp.
Abrufbar unter <http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/Koenig6.htm>

[Zurück zur [Leitseite](#)]