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Symposium – Perspectives on Motivation for Second Language Learning on the 50th Anniversary of Gardner & Lambert (1959)

Held at the Association canadienne de linguistique appliquée/Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics Conference, Ottawa, Canada; 28 May 2009.

With the 50th anniversary of Robert C. Gardner and Wallace Lambert's seminal paper 'Motivational variables in second language acquisition' (Gardner & Lambert 1959), we paused to reflect on the contributions the work has inspired and the state of the art in the study of motivation research. There were five papers presented in the session:

- 'Gardner & Lambert (1959): Fifty years and counting' by R. C. Gardner (University of Western Ontario) (available at publish.uwo.ca/~gardner/docs/CAAL0ttawa2009talk.pdf)
- 'Diversity and globalization: Language effects and bilingualism' by Richard Clément (University of Ottawa)
- 'From "Because I have to" to "Because I want to": A longitudinal study of the internalization of language learning motivation' by Kimberly Noels (University of Alberta)
- 'Learning languages in a world of English' by John Edwards (St. Francis Xavier University)

- ‘Motivation and “the self” as predictors of willingness to communicate among immersion students by Peter MacIntyre & Jason Legatto (Cape Breton University)

The session can be summarized in terms of two main areas: the impact of the model and the role of motivation in the multiple interacting systems of language learning.

Impact of Gardner & Lambert’s paper

It has become clear that Gardner & Lambert’s paper helped to launch the social psychological study of second language acquisition, and that it remains part of a vibrant research program. In his symposium paper, R. C. Gardner himself discussed the origins of research that eventually became the socio-educational model. In my paper with Jason Legatto, we argued that the socio-educational model was ahead of its time in at least three significant ways. First, Gardner & Lambert showed that attitudes and motivation MATTER in second language acquisition, taking their place alongside aptitude and intelligence as factors contributing to language learning success, and setting the stage for the social psychological approach to studying second language acquisition. Second, the research tradition has combined affective and cognitive factors in a single motivational frame, describing a uniquely human motive. The model developed at moments in history when animal learning models (e.g., instincts) or ‘cold cognition’ (i.e., without contribution from emotion) dominated discussions of motivation in psychology. By considering the multiple social, cognitive, and affective forces that produce both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes that feedback on each other, the socio-educational model could plausibly be proposed in the current *zeitgeist* as a brand new way to do research. Third, the research tradition initiated by the Gardner & Lambert paper employed cutting-edge statistical analysis, including regression techniques and structural equation modeling that have become widely used in our field.

Historically speaking, the impact of this research has been substantial. But if Mark Twain will forgive the turn of phrase, rumors of the demise of the socio-educational model have been greatly exaggerated. Efforts to restrict this model to a specific time (e.g., the 1990s; see Dörnyei 2005) or a specific place (e.g., Canada; Crookes & Schmidt 1991) have been corrected by Gardner’s continuing research and new-found support for the model around the world. In his presentation, Gardner referred to these as ‘the international studies’; the work continues today. No thesis or dissertation, let alone a published paper, should ever again be permitted to claim that Gardner’s work belongs to a distant past, only in a bilingual Canada, or that Gardner’s model is static.

Motivation in interacting systems

With respect to the notion that motivation changes over time, the session further concluded that for individual learners, language attitudes and motives are part of multiple interacting systems. We might examine the systems from the perspective of attributes of the learner, the classroom, a social setting, and/or a time and place in history. The forces that impact on language can be understood from multiple complementary and sometimes competing

perspectives, because languages themselves represent complementary and competing forces for individual, social, and cultural development.

The notion that languages both complement and compete with each other was reinforced in Richard Clément's paper highlighting the double-edged sword that language learning sometimes provides. On the one hand, language may serve as both an instrument that can threaten minority languages by cutting ties to one's heritage and culture(s), but language is also a tool for intergroup harmony by allowing for persons to act as mediators between groups. Clément emphasized the important ways in which use of specific types of words (e.g., concrete action verbs) affect the perceptions of people in another language group. These processes foreground the importance of language attitudes as both a cause and a consequence of language use in remarkably intricate and subtle ways.

Although the symposium papers discussed the causal role of language attitudes and motivation, this role has been questioned by some authors. For example, Sparks, Ganschow & Javorsky (2000) have argued that variables such as anxiety, attitudes, and motivation are merely byproducts of learning. Kimberly Noels tackled the difficult issue of causality, providing evidence of the process by which motivation becomes internalized over the course of an academic year. Using a cross-lagged panel analysis, Noels concluded that autonomy at the beginning of the year leads to effort directed toward learning mid-year, and this effort leads to greater feelings of autonomy by the end of the language course. Noels couched this research in the self-determination framework, showing that language attitudes contribute to the sense of self, a conclusion also reached by MacIntyre & Legatto.

John Edwards' paper reminded us that the role of language attitudes extends well beyond the sense of self and may have global implications or, more specifically, implications for globalization. Using the English language as an exemplar, and taking a very long historical view, Edwards noted that broad social forces, such as demographic shifts, migration, and the economic prowess of dominant nation states, have a reciprocal impact on language attitudes and motivation. For example, economic success might inspire an instrumental orientation toward learning English and in turn the learning of English has implications for international commerce. This is not to suggest that languages in decline will inevitably fail, or that the dominance of English is assured, but it does suggest the need to muster considerable motivational force to keep some languages alive.

The presentations that comprised this symposium contribute to a stronger understanding of the importance of language attitudes and motivations. The 50th anniversary of the origins of the socio-educational model provided an opportunity to reflect on the work it continues to inspire, and the ways in which language learning attitudes and motivation interact with individual, social, cultural, and historical trends.

Not long after the symposium we received sad news. On 22 August 2009, Wallace (Wally) Lambert passed away in Montreal at the age of 86. He will be remembered for his intellectual curiosity, generosity, and playfulness as well as his important contributions to early French immersion and the study of bilingualism.

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