

Motivation in Language Learning - The Case of Francophone Cameroonian Learners of English

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present a report of an experiment carried out recently. The study was concerned with the measurement of the motivation and attitudes of Francophone Cameroonian learners of English. This particular area of study caught the researcher's attention because in spite of the fact that Cameroon has been a bilingual state for nearly twenty years, not every Cameroonian speaks both French and English which are the official languages of the state.

What makes the situation even worse is the fact that the government spends much money in fostering bilingualism without even stating the direction to which the bilingualism is geared. As a result there is a lot of resistance from some of the citizens as to why they should study a second official language. This means that the kind of attitude towards bilingualism exhibited in Cameroon by the government affects the kind of motivation and attitudes which young Cameroonians have towards the English language.

French is a dominant official language because of the numerical advantages of French speakers over English speakers. This makes it possible that anglophones become generally more enthusiastic in learning French than the francophones are in learning English.

Hypotheses

The main hypothesis in this study was that instrumental motives, in other words material gains are more important in language learning than integrative ones which involve learning a language for the purpose of being able to identify oneself with speakers of the target language. This means that francophone Cameroonian learners of English are likely to be more motivated and would also develop more positive attitudes towards the English language if they had any material gains at stake, than when the learning of the language was simply to be able to identify themselves with the speakers of the target language.

The present investigation was thus based on a previous study carried out by two Canadian scholars: Gardner and Lambert. They carried out the research first in Canada, then the U.S.A. and the Philippines. According to them:

An individual successfully acquiring a second language gradually adopts various features of behavior which characterize another linguistic and, as is often the case, another cultural group. The learner's ethnocentric disposition and his attitude toward the other group are believed to influence his success in learning the new language. His motivation to acquire the language is considered to be determined both by his attitudes toward the other group and by his orientation toward learning a second language. This orientation takes an "instrumental" form if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement such as getting ahead in one's work, and an "integrative" form if the student is oriented toward learning more about the other cultural community, as if he were eager to be a potential member of the other group. Furthermore it is argued that some individuals may be prone to learn another language as a means of potential acceptance in another cultural group because of dissatisfaction experienced in their own group, while others may be seriously interested in another culture as they are in their own....

(Gardner and Lambert, 1972: 22-229)

According to Gardner (1985), one might think that those with favourable attitudes would be more attentive, serious, rewarded, etc. than those with negative attitudes, but even so, such attitudes might not be related to achievement. An individual could hold positive attitudes, but prefer not to study the language in school because of a feeling that such a context is inappropriate, or because of a dislike for the teacher, for example. This makes it difficult to be able to relate attitudes to achievement. This experiment then set out to see how what Gardner and Lambert (1972) carried out in Canada, U.S.A. and the Philippines can be applied to the Cameroonian context.

The main hypothesis in this study is closely related to a number of assumptions which also affect language learning.

1. There is a relationship between the student's former residence and his present residence with motivation and attitudes.
2. The languages used at home and their frequencies of usage influence motivation and attitudes.
3. The number of lessons per week and the coefficient attached to the target language affect the motivation and attitudes of the learners.
4. There is also a relationship between motivation and attitudes of the learners and the actual classroom situation in terms of the time, the length of the lesson, the textbook and the teacher.
5. The learner's environment, in terms of parents, government policy, friends, in fact the socio-cultural context can either help to develop a negative or a positive attitude in the learner and to a certain extent would determine his motivation in the learning.
6. The opinions of the learners about anglophone Cameroonians and native speakers of English would affect their motivation and also the kind of attitude they bring to the learning.
7. Learners in technical schools will learn English more and will be more motivated and would also possess positive attitudes towards English since it is not only an international language, but also the language of business.
8. Learners in bilingual schools will have more positive attitudes and will be more motivated than those from non-bilingual schools.
9. There is a relationship between the willingness to marry from another language group and the attitudes and motivation of those concerned.

10. Boys are more motivated and have more positive attitudes towards the language being learned and other things associated with it.

Thus, according to Gardner and Lambert (1972) a learner will learn a language well depending on whether he is integratively or instrumentally motivated to do so. By integrative motivation is meant the student's desire to be identified as a member of the target language community. In such a case, the successful learner must be one who is psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behaviour which characterize members of the target language group. His motivation is determined by his attitude towards the other group and towards foreign people in general. He learns more about the other cultural community because he is interested in it. On the other hand instrumental motivation is often brought about by utilitarian or material aims. It may occur when the language is for example being used to fulfill an educational requirement, to get a better job or to read material in the language.

The Corpus and Methodology

The present study was based on responses elicited from a corpus of 1210 Francophone learners of English in eleven schools in Yaounde, the nation's capital. The students were randomly selected from the Fourth to the Upper Sixth forms in the secondary school. They ranged from the ages of 14 to 22 years. These informants were required to fill a questionnaire in French, administered by Cameroonian bilingual francophones. The students were not aware of the fact that the interviewers could speak French and English fluently. Their responses were coded and entered into the computer for analysis. The level of significance in the analysis was set at 0.05 and the SPSS system was used.

Results

The analysis revealed that contrary to Gardner and Lambert (1972), instrumental motives are more important to Francophone Cameroonian learners of English than integrative ones. Other assumptions examined in the study revealed the following:

1. There is a relationship between the learners' former residence and his present residence with attitudes and motivation.
2. The relationship between the languages used at home and their frequency of usage and attitudes and motivation, generally speaking is not always clear.
3. There is a significant relationship between the coefficient attached to the target language and the attitudes and motivation of the learners. This is in line with the central idea since the coefficient is concerned with an instrumental motive - that of passing an examination.
4. The socio-cultural context of learning a language has an influence on the learner's attitudes and motivation. Language planning in Cameroon does not take note of the motivation and attitudes of those concerned.
5. There is a significant relationship between the learners' opinions about anglophone Cameroonians and the attitudes and motivation of the learners as far as instrumental motivation is concerned.
6. Francophone Cameroonian learners of English in technical schools are more motivated in learning English since they see English as a window on trade and technology.

7. There is a significant relationship between the level of motivation of francophone students and whether they are learning English in bilingual schools or in non-bilingual schools.
8. There is a significant relationship between the willingness of a francophone learner to marry into an anglophone family and his attitude to learning English.
9. There is a significant relationship between sex and attitudes and motivation.
10. Francophone students who are in the process of studying the English language have generally, negative stereotypes about the basic personality characteristics of English speaking people.
11. Francophone learners of English see no need for learning English since they "feel alright" with French.

This study revealed that there is a vital need to develop instrumental motivation in francophone learners of English in Cameroon. There is a need to improve on the methodology of teaching. The place of rewards in school (praise, grades, recognition of progress) is crucial and they should be used as incentives to encourage learning.

The government must create services to function in English. As long as francophone Cameroonians cannot rely on English economically, militarily, administratively and educationally they will hardly realize any need for learning a language for learning's sake. Appointments to high positions in the civil service should reflect the bilingual policy of the country. This means that being perfectly and functionally bilingual in English and French should be a pre-condition for being appointed to a senior post. The citizens should be made to realize the importance of the language by seeing how functional the language is in the administration of the country. A bilingual allowance can be instituted in the Public Service. Just a little token of ten thousand francs is enough to spur a lot of people to learn the extra language.

It is hoped that the government will use the results of this study to re-orient the bilingual policy for the country. The government should clearly define and reformulate the language policy of the state.

Conclusion

The study revealed what has been plaguing bilingualism in Cameroon till date. Emphasis should not only be on material integration but also on incentives in the form of material benefits.

The results of the study should spur the government to provide more services in English. Public and para-public companies should be functional in English. Encouragement should be given to firms from other English-speaking countries that want to establish business in Cameroon. Because people would have to solicit jobs from these firms, they would be forced to learn English in order to be placed in some of the lucrative posts that the firms will bring. Unless there are enough material incentives at stake, francophone Cameroonians will never realize any need for learning English. The bilingual policy of Cameroon should be collocated in a bi-cultural environment where the two official languages (French and English) should display a cultural back-drop.

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