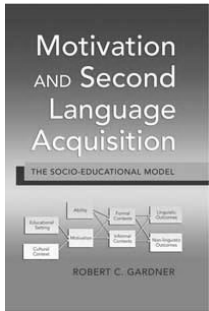


**Motivation and Second Language Acquisition: The Socio-Educational Model**

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<b>Motivation and Second Language Acquisition: The Socio-Educational Model</b>		
<b>Author:</b>	Gardner, R. C. (2010)	
<b>Publisher:</b>	New York: Peter Lang	
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Having taught ESL/EFL for almost thirty years, I welcomed the Socio-educational model and the possibility that it could define work and thinking in language acquisition for years to come—because it has been clear to me all along that a student’s learning is most directly influenced by his/her perception of the way the new language fits into his/her social experience. While I recognized that such terms as “motivation” and “integrative orientation” might be difficult to define and measure, I at least felt that researchers were now going in the right direction, in relating students’ success directly to the way they were able to integrate the process of language learning into their social experience.

Gardner, in this book, tries to defend the extensive work he and his colleagues have done in this area, and tries to define motivation more clearly for the Socio-educational Model’s now extensive following. He walks us through the definition of motivation; the history of the model; the modern age (of investigation into these constructs, which he defines as the 1980’s on); the parts of the Socio-educational Model; the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB); his work in Europe and outside of the Canadian environment that he started in; EFL around the world; and finally, language classroom motivation (this last chapter being perhaps most useful for the classroom teacher). His epilogue responds directly to some of the criticisms that have been leveled at him and his work over the years.

I began reading with the standard conception of motivation: that it is best or most often divided into instrumental (that of students who clearly see the use of the language, and learn it for that use, for example, getting an engineering degree), and integrative (that of those students who want to experience a new culture, know people, open themselves up, etc.). But Gardner makes several points about this distinction. First, for many people, there are several reasons for learning a language, some instrumental, some integrative, and they are difficult if not possible to separate. But most important, motivation to Gardner is not the reason one wants to learn the language, motivation is the demonstration of its result: expending effort to learn it, wanting to achieve the goal, and actually enjoying the task as a result. From Gardner's point of view, the reason is not important in determining whether a learner is successful; only the strength of one's motivation will influence the result. Finally, while he and his colleagues did extensive research into "integrative orientation" and its influence on the success of language learners, it alone is not a motivation, but rather a set of attitudes that may or may not translate into what he would call motivation. It is useful, he says, because you do useful things as a result of it. But it is possible to have integrative orientation, and still be without motivation of any useful force.

The Socio-educational Model was founded on the idea that since language learning involves developing a new identity and operating in new social contexts, it must be understood in terms of the way the individual chooses to, or is able to, take on that identity and use it in a new environment. Gardner and his colleagues, who were clearly at the heart of the development of the model and research into its hypotheses for years, started in Canada with francophones learning English and English-speakers learning French. When he retired, to his credit, he tried to address the criticism that Canada was a unique situation because of its nationally recognized bilingualism, so he took his tests to Europe and did a number of studies with students in all kinds of other situations.

The result was a fairly clear conception of the attitudes and perceptions that students bring into various classrooms, and that ultimately determine whether a student will be successful. He is clearly right in stating that attitudes toward a particular class and/or teacher must be distinguished from attitudes toward learning the language in general; and that teachers are dealing with a moving target in the sense that one's motivation changes directly as a result of what one experiences, both within and outside of the classroom.

The ATMB posits statements such as "I wish I could have many native English speaking friends"— and "I look forward to the time I spend in English class" in a standard Likert format (agree strongly, etc.), thus allowing the quantification of attitudes and perceptions toward the teacher, the class, the language, the culture, etc. Responses clearly could be skewed by circumstances, but not so much in the ATMB, according to Gardner, as in what he called a "mini-test" which simply asked directly questions such as: "My attitude towards learning English is (unfavorable....favorable – scale of 1 through 7). The distinction between the two tests and the variety of results extracted from each brings up probably the most

crucial issue in my mind. That is, that because language is so close to the heart of our self-perception, we test-takers often tend to answer with what we want to believe, rather than what is really true. Second, because these questionnaires are given to us in classroom settings, by researchers or teachers, we frame our answers in relation to what they want to hear, or what should be true, or even, what had been true up until today. I found myself wondering about the reliability of the responses of vast numbers of ATMB-takers worldwide. I realized that, to some degree, I had been doing anyway (without the ATMB) what most teachers do anyway: trying to get a good read on each student's motivation, both motivation to learn the language itself, and motivation to pass or do well in the class.

At first I disagreed with his statement that motivation was not a reason for learning, but rather the positive energy the learner converts that into, that allows the learner to, for example, enjoy a difficult class. I've known plenty of students who I considered motivated to learn, but who still clearly did not enjoy their classes. His point is that if they are unable to convert that reason into the positive feelings that will make that classroom experience successful, they can't be said to be "motivated". I'm not sure Gardner can get the world to accept this definition, but I can see how it would make it easier for him to use an instrument like the ATMB to predict student success and better understand classroom dynamics. It is also quite helpful when thinking about the various characters one encounters in the field of language teaching, for whom motivation as Gardner defines it is possibly the single most crucial variable in their success.

May I suggest, though, that it is next to impossible to change a language, or change what people commonly refer to as "motivation"; it might be possible among a small group of researchers, but even then if what this group uses is at odds with what the general public uses or means, misunderstanding is set up for years. It's better to set up entirely new terms, and define them, as researchers did in the field of "stress", than to try to change the general public's conception of what they are. Further, in the isolating and measuring of characteristics that promote or detract from language learning (such as integrative orientation, or language anxiety), may I suggest cultural flexibility (the ability to recognize cultural constraints and remove oneself from them, at least temporarily), and tolerance for ambiguity (or at least tolerance for the kind of multiple possibilities that interpreting language often requires). Accurate and careful definition and measurement of the characteristics of the successful language learner is in fact the first step in understanding and improving the process of language teaching.

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