

The Influence of Goal Orientations and Language Experiences on the Behaviors of Japanese University Students Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Introduction

In educational practice, it seems impossible for teachers to access the mental organization which enables their students to acquire their native language, but it is possible for them to manipulate the affective variables of motivation and anxiety, the cognitive variables of beliefs and strategy, and other past language experiences, which in turn, can contribute to their L2 (second language) and FL (foreign language) learning. Particularly, in FL settings, Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) lack the exposure of authentic materials of English, and thus may consider it necessary for them to maintain their will to study English, when compared to learners in an L2 context. Hence, the present study investigates the relationship among the aforementioned variables, and their impact on learning behaviors within a framework of Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986) to construct a model of those variables from an educational psychological perspective.

Review of the Literature

Goal Theory in Educational Psychology

In Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986), individual behaviors are thought to be rational and economic in order to achieve certain goals. Goals set by an individual influence his or her choice of strategy, methodology, and process toward those goals. According to Dweck (1986), there are two types of goal orientations: Learning Goal (LG) and Performance Goal (PG). The former refers to the orientation to increase competence and understand something new, and the latter refers to the orientation to gain positive judgment (PG-positive), or to avoid

negative judgment of his or her competence (PG-negative). Based on what kind of goals an individual student has, Goal Theory can be used to make predictions about the student's learning behavior and learning outcome (Dweck, 1986). In addition, goal orientations are also thought to be a relatively stable human trait extracted from beliefs. This is also known as the "theory of intelligence." This theory encapsulates the ideas of "incremental theory" and "entity theory." According to Dweck (1986), the former refers to the idea that "intelligence is malleable" (p.1041) and the latter refers to the idea that "intelligence is fixed" (p.1041), and the individual student's theory of intelligence appear to orient him or her toward different goals. Since Goal Theory assumes that the student's *theory of intelligence* has been internalized in his or her infancy, somewhat like a personality trait (cf. Dweck, C. S., 1999; Pintrich, P. R., 2000), which is relatively stable over the course of a person's lifetime, the dilemma of "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" can be avoided by adopting Goal Theory. The premise being that goal orientations are thought to come first, or at least before the other variables of learning beliefs, anxieties, and strategies, which, on the other hand, easily change because they are unstable.

Affective and Cognitive factors in L2 and EFL

Most research on affective variables in language learning (e.g., Kondo & Yang, 2003; Liu & Jackson, 2008) has dealt with the role of motivation and the debilitating role of anxiety, but has denied the direct relationship between affective variables and proficiency. Conversely, several studies on cognitive variables of learning strategies (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret,

1997; Kubo, 1999) have indicated that strategy use has both positive and negative impacts on proficiency, depending on the socio-cultural and educational contexts where the target language is taught or learnt. For an L2 environment, Gardner et al. (1997) examined a latent factor model called “the Socio-Educational Model” and reported an integrative motivation toward the target language, and that the L2 community had a significant positive impact on L2 achievement. Alternatively, in the context of an EFL environment, Kubo (1999) proposed the Orientation-Appraisal Model, which indicated that motivation had a significant positive impact on the strategy factor and, in turn, the strategy had a significant impact on EFL achievement. The contribution of Kubo (1999)’s model was that it showed how this *strategy* perspective might play a much greater role in the EFL classroom in Japan than in the L2 context of North America. However, neither of these models disregards the role of *learner beliefs*. Regarding the relationship of college EFL learners’ beliefs about language learning and the strategies they used, Yang (1999) reported that students’ beliefs were related to certain types of learning strategies, and claimed learner beliefs might be one factor that influences learning behaviors. Therefore, the current study examines the roles and interactions among those variables with a special focus on the variable of learner beliefs.

Language Experience

Even though past language experience such as overseas experience in a country where the target language is spoken is considered to be one of the most important factors for being a successful language learner (Falk & Kanach, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998), the previous models lacked some variables of past experience and the influence of these variables still remains unexamined.

English learning in elementary schools in Japan is another type of past language experience. Researchers (Higuchi, 1999; Kuniyoshi, 1996) have found positive outcomes from learners who have experienced this type of learning. Thus, the present study also examines the impact of overseas experience and learning in elementary school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the affective variables of motivation and anxiety, the cognitive variables of beliefs and strategy, and past language

experiences that have had an impact upon how Japanese university students learn English; all within the framework of Goal Theory. A second purpose is to delineate the implications for practice and further research. This study assumes that the types of goal orientations students possess, and their past language experiences will influence their types of beliefs, their level of anxiety, and their behaviors. In short, this study aims at examining the following research questions:

1. Can we predict language learning beliefs, anxiety, and behaviors based on students’ goal orientations?
2. Can we predict language learning beliefs, anxiety, and behaviors based on past language experiences?

Methods

Participants

There were three hundred and seventy five (375; male: 272, female: 103) participants who took part in the current study. All were non-English majors at a Japanese national university in the Kanto area. All participants were freshman, and were enrolled in compulsory English classes. Ranging in age from 18 to 32 years (96.5% were under 21), the majority of the participants (92.3%) had never visited a foreign country, and 25.8% of them began to study English in elementary school (ELES). Further, 62.7% of the participants studied English outside the classroom for more than one hour a week.

Instruments

There were a total of 54 items (except for qualitative and open-ended questions) on the questionnaire given to the participants, all of which, except the ones related to age, majors and English-learning background, were accompanied by a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Goal Orientation Scale. In order to assess the students’ levels and types of goal orientations, a revised version of the *Mokuhyo Tassei Keikou Shakudo*, which is translated here as “Goal Orientation Scale” was used. The original version of the *Mokuhyo Tassei Keikou Shakudo* developed by Hayamizu, Ito, and Yoshizaki (1989), was designed for younger Japanese students’ goal orientations in accordance with the basic tenets of Goal Theory. For the purpose of the current study, the original version was modified in ways that would make it more

appropriate for Japanese university students. The revised version consisted of 9 items, each of which stated a possible reason for achievement or learning. Based on the framework of Dweck (1986), the 3 items of G4, G5, and G6 in Table 1 were related to learning goal (LG) orientation, and 6 items were related to performance goal (PG) orientation (G1, G2, and G3 were related to avoiding negative judgment and G7, G8, and G9 were related to gaining positive judgment) in Table 1.

Strategy Inventory. In order to assess how the participants utilized Organization strategy (S1, S2, and S3), Guess strategy (S4, S5, and S6), Repeating strategy (S7, S8, and S9), Imaging strategy (S10, S11, and S12), and Media strategy (S13, S14, and S15) for studying vocabulary in a reading and grammar class, Metacognitive strategy (S16, S17, and S18), and Social strategy (S19, S20, and S21), the strategy inventory (Nakayama, 2005) was used. It is a revised version of SILL developed by Oxford (1990) and consisted of 21 items, each involving a statement describing strategy use.

Beliefs Inventory. First, in order to assess participants' beliefs about English learning, an EFL version (Nakayama, 2005) of the BALLI developed by Horwitz (1987) for North American learners of foreign languages was used. It consisted of 9 items on beliefs about language learning in Japan: Beliefs about Excellent Pronunciation (B1, B2, and B3), Traditional English Learning Beliefs (B4, B5, and B6), and Self-confidence Beliefs (B7, B8, and B9). Second, in order to assess general learning beliefs, Ueki's (2002) scale was used without modification. It consisted of 9 items on General Learning Beliefs: Beliefs about Learning Environment (B10, B11, and B12), Beliefs about Good Learners (B13,

B14, and B15), and Beliefs about Effort (B16, B17, and B18).

Anxiety Scales. In order to assess participants' anxiety in English learning, the Language Learning Anxieties Scale developed by Mori (2003) was used. It consisted of 6 items on anxiety in English language learning in Japan: Future Use Anxiety (A1, A2, and A3) and In Class Anxiety (A4, A5, and A6).

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to general education English classes toward the end of the 2nd semester of the 2005-2006 academic year. The students filled out a consent form and completed the survey in 30 minutes at the end of one lesson. Of 400 collected questionnaires, only 375 could be used; the others were discarded because they were incomplete.

Results

Item Analysis

Tables 1 to 4 show the descriptive statistics, the results of factor analysis for checking the reliability of the scales (cf., principal factor analysis with Varimax Rotation), and the value of Cronbach's α . For further analysis, those items which scored more than .70 in Cronbach's α were summed.

First, from Table 1, the internal consistency of each factor in the goal orientation scale was determined. Three factors were extracted and 59.7% of the total variance can be explained by this factor solution. From Table 1 we can infer that the participants tended to study because they enjoyed the increase in competence they demonstrated, and they also gained both an

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Goal Orientation Scale (N=375)*

Item Description	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	F1	F2	F3
<u>Performance Goal Orientation: PG-negative ($\alpha = .735$)</u>					
G1 I study because I don't want to be seen as foolish by others.	2.99	1.78	.121	.153	.764
G2 I study because I want to be noticed by my friends.	2.83	1.61	.170	-.011	.775
G3 I study because I don't want to be scolded by my parents and teachers.	2.88	1.69	-.068	.096	.545
<u>Learning Goal Orientation: LG ($\alpha = .837$)</u>					
G4 I study because I enjoy finding new means of problem-solving.	4.80	1.69	.807	-.054	.104
G5 I study because I enjoy knowing that I can do it.	5.20	1.52	.902	-.010	.061
G6 I study because what I study now will in turn help me to understand new ideas.	5.16	1.51	.677	-.015	.024
<u>Performance Goal Orientation: PG-positive ($\alpha = .765$)</u>					
G7 I study because I don't want to fail a credit.	5.80	1.40	-.073	.949	.010
G8 I study because I don't want to repeat a year.	5.79	1.47	-.083	.862	.046
G9 I study because I want to get good marks in my exams.	5.41	1.53	.055	.417	.223

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Learning Strategy (N=375)*

Item Description	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
<u>Organization Strategy ($\alpha = .743$)</u>									
S1 I connect words to other words which can be used in the same context.	3.72	1.73	.191	.179	.101	.027	.498	.120	.069
S2 I categorize words into synonyms and antonyms.	4.14	1.73	.078	.056	.104	.140	.953	.091	.085
S3 I associate words with their conjugated forms.	4.65	1.62	.063	.131	.308	.134	.525	.133	.119
<u>Guess Strategy ($\alpha = .812$)</u>									
S4 I guess the meanings of words by thinking of the relationship between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	5.42	1.46	.046	.031	.884	.047	.111	-.036	.041
S5 I guess the meanings of words from the context and the meaning of a passage.	5.72	1.31	-.008	-.014	.793	.006	.087	-.068	.022
S6 I guess the meanings of words from a part of speech, a prefix, and derived forms of them.	5.11	1.55	.027	.203	.618	.037	.130	-.011	.016
<u>Repeating Strategy ($\alpha = .676$)</u>									
S7 I learn words by heart by translating them from Japanese into English, and vice versa, several times.	3.24	1.79	.106	.125	-.039	.123	.117	.492	-.009
S8 I learn words by writing the words many times in order to recall them perfectly.	3.80	1.96	.057	-.019	-.111	-.154	.044	.881	.092
S9 I learn words by writing and pronouncing them.	4.33	1.92	.098	.274	.047	-.019	.116	.535	.115
<u>Imaging Strategy ($\alpha = .765$)</u>									
S10 I look at new words and phrases over again and again so that I can make an image of the words in my mind.	4.55	1.78	.039	.008	.079	.820	.095	-.025	.075
S11 I learn words by recalling the spelling of them in my mind.	4.07	1.78	.021	.112	.017	.696	.000	.056	.114
S12 I learn words by looking at the arrangement of the alphabet of each word and grasping the characteristics of them.	4.02	1.89	.032	.055	.004	.637	.116	-.037	.024
<u>Media Strategy ($\alpha = .748$)</u>									
S13 I study English through movies.	3.39	1.93	.096	.698	.066	.079	.141	.114	.016
S14 I study English through radio programs or audio-CD materials.	3.50	1.93	.055	.657	.070	.042	.052	.098	.107
S15 I study English through TV news programs.	2.63	1.78	.163	.681	.065	.048	.058	.086	.122
<u>Metacognitive Strategy ($\alpha = .761$)</u>									
S16 I look for as many opportunities as possible to read books written in English.	3.55	1.78	.165	.567	.079	.106	.154	.086	.459
S17 I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.22	1.75	.104	.173	.113	.172	.103	.072	.886
S18 I make a study plan so I can make enough time to study English.	2.79	1.54	.292	.261	-.068	.093	.162	.153	.464
<u>Social Strategy ($\alpha = .899$)</u>									
S19 In order for them to correct my mistakes, I study English with those who are good at English.	2.88	1.68	.788	.194	-.002	.028	.108	.092	.159
S20 I practice English with other students.	2.91	1.69	.815	.118	.067	.048	.104	.085	.067
S21 I study English with those who are good at English so that I can ask them for help.	3.00	1.76	.913	.084	.016	.028	.087	.108	.063

understanding of new ideas and a positive outlook on learning English.

From Table 2, the internal consistency of each factor in the Strategy inventory was found, with the exception of Repeating strategy. Seven factors were extracted, and 59.4% of the total variance can be explained by this factor solution. It is inferred from Table 2 that the participants, as a whole, tended to use Organization strategy, Guess strategy and Imaging strategy, and also tended not to use Repeating strategy, Media strategy, Metacognitive strategy, and Social strategy (the mean average of those strategy variables was < 4.00). In addition, since item S16 in the Metacognitive strategy showed a high factor loading in two factors, only two

items of S17 and S18 were summed up and used for further statistical analysis.

From Table 3, the internal consistency of each factor in beliefs was found, except for Beliefs about Excellent Pronunciation, Beliefs about Learning Environment, and Beliefs about Good Learners. Six factors were extracted, and 47.5% of the total variance can be explained by this factor solution. It is inferred from Table 3 that the participants, as a whole, tended to feel self confident and believed that making an effort is important in language learning.

From Table 4, the internal consistency of each factor in Learning Anxiety was found. Two factors were extracted, and 67.3% of the total variance can be

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Learning Beliefs (N=375)*

Item Description	M	SD	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
<u>Beliefs about Excellent Pronunciation ($\alpha = .285$)</u>								
B1 It's important to speak English with an excellent accent.	5.35	1.59	.070	.207	.305	.162	.010	.248
B2 You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	2.14	1.40	.346	-.150	-.193	-.001	.011	.148
B3 To study English is to learn how to pronounce English correctly.	3.60	1.45	.216	-.076	.036	.206	.033	.687
<u>Traditional English Learning Beliefs ($\alpha = .763$)</u>								
B4 To study English is mostly to memorize as many words as you can.	3.98	1.62	.701	.158	.021	-.038	.058	.237
B5 To study English is mostly to memorize as many grammar rules as you can.	3.92	1.50	.784	.114	.108	-.031	.113	.025
B6 To study English is mostly to learn how to translate English into Japanese and vice versa.	4.19	1.55	.631	.128	-.023	-.057	.062	-.034
<u>Self Confidence Beliefs ($\alpha = .717$)</u>								
B7 I have an aptitude to acquire English.	3.34	1.67	.034	-.091	.046	.569	.142	.185
B8 I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.	4.21	1.68	-.014	-.023	.064	.899	.063	.063
B9 Everyone can learn to speak English.	4.61	1.75	-.143	.144	.051	.580	.049	.009
<u>Beliefs about Learning Environment ($\alpha = .582$)</u>								
B10 It is important to be in an environment in which I can study effectively.	5.13	1.59	.164	.231	.201	.088	.297	.024
B11 If my teachers are good at teaching, I get a good grade.	4.52	1.77	.081	.083	.155	.000	.759	-.079
B12 I get good grade when I am in an advanced learner class.	3.49	1.73	.073	.011	-.041	.210	.596	.102
<u>Beliefs about Good Learners ($\alpha = .651$)</u>								
B13 Those who can do well are good learners.	5.37	1.43	-.046	.103	.425	.022	.225	.093
B14 It is effective to establish your own preferred strategy.	6.05	1.03	.004	.098	.801	.057	.012	-.002
B15 It is effective to find a good strategy by trial and error.	5.63	1.25	-.019	.068	.667	.033	.019	-.030
<u>Beliefs about Effort ($\alpha = .769$)</u>								
B16 You can unconsciously acquire knowledge and skills when you do it again and again.	5.94	1.20	.026	.562	.413	.020	.052	-.058
B17 It is effective to study with sheer willpower.	5.41	1.45	.043	.851	.088	.030	.060	.002
B18 It is effective to make a steady effort.	5.33	1.56	.201	.706	.085	-.023	.089	-.020

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of Learning Anxiety Scale (N=375)*

Item Description	M	SD	F1	F2
<u>Future Use Anxiety ($\alpha = .915$)</u>				
A1 I feel anxious about how much I can use English when abroad.	5.80	1.45	.886	.184
A2 I feel anxious about how much I can make myself understood in English when abroad.	5.79	1.45	.949	.189
A3 I feel anxious about whether I can say what I want to say in English when abroad.	5.52	1.64	.763	.249
<u>In Class Anxiety ($\alpha = .758$)</u>				
A4 I fear making mistakes in English pronunciation in class.	4.15	1.84	.203	.668
A5 I feel stressed when I make a presentation in class	4.52	1.85	.157	.909
A6 I never feel anxious in English class. (Reversed item)	4.02	1.83	-.136	-.535

explained by this factor solution. It is inferred from Table 4 that the participants tended to feel anxiety at the prospect of using English abroad in the future as opposed to feeling anxiety in the classroom.

Categorical Regression Analysis

As Table 5 demonstrates, the results of ANOVA for examining whether the regression formulae (equations) for predicting whether dependent variables are adequate or not were significant, which means that it is possible to predict those dependent variables by the independent

variables of "PG negative", "LG", "PG positive", "overseas experience", and "English learning in a formal classroom setting during elementary school (ELES)". These results are discussed in relation to the research questions below.

Discussion

Research Question 1: Can we predict language learning beliefs, anxiety, and behaviors based on students' goal orientations?

Table 5. Summary of Categorical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Behaviors, Beliefs, and Anxiety (N=375)

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables (β)					ANOVA
	PG negative	LG	PG positive	Overseas experience	ELES	
Behaviors						
Strategy:						
Organization Strategy ($\Delta R^2 = .057$)	-.135***	.233***	.043	.101*	-.018	.001**
Guess Strategy ($\Delta R^2 = .046$)	-.174***	.170***	.129***	.115**	.037	.005**
Imaging Strategy ($\Delta R^2 = .025$)	.099	.159***	.068	-.007	.015	.026*
Media Strategy ($\Delta R^2 = .152$)	.082	.244***	-.254***	.149**	.093*	.000***
Metacognitive Strategy ($\Delta R^2 = .148$)	.179***	.314***	-.150**	-.072	.036	.000***
Social Strategy ($\Delta R^2 = .072$)	.228***	.139**	-.136***	-.007	.017	.000***
Learning Time:						
Average time of learning English outside the classroom ($\Delta R^2 = .084$)	.110**	.169***	-.167***	.167**	.085	.000***
Beliefs						
Traditional English Learning Beliefs ($\Delta R^2 = .060$)	.194***	.046	.158***	-.079	-.040	.000***
Self-confidence Beliefs ($\Delta R^2 = .145$)	.077	.302***	-.177***	.168***	-.063	.000***
Beliefs about Effort ($\Delta R^2 = .101$)	.084*	.189***	.287***	.025	.006	.000***
Anxiety						
Future Use Anxiety ($\Delta R^2 = .107$)	.087*	.037	.257***	-.205***	-.017	.000***
In Class Anxiety ($\Delta R^2 = .056$)	.155**	.047	.186***	-.093	-.052	.001**

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

First, concerning learner beliefs, Self-confidence Beliefs were positively affected by LG and negatively affected by PG-negative, and that supports the different roles of LG and PG orientations in Goal Theory. That is, those who have LG would be more confident in the studying the target subject (i.e., English). Traditional English Learning Beliefs and Beliefs about Effort were positively affected by PG-negative and PG-positive. Next, regarding anxiety, all the anxiety factors were positively affected by PG-negative and PG-positive. Third, regarding the participants' behaviors, their use of all strategies and the students' average time of learning English outside the classroom is positively affected by LG. Those who have LG orientation tend to use all of the strategies presented in this study. Since Organization strategy and Guess strategy are negatively affected by PG-negative, those who avoid negative judgment of their own competence tend not to use them. On the other hand, those who want to gain positive judgment tend to use media strategy, metacognitive strategy, and social strategy because those strategies were positively affected by PG-positive.

Research Question 2: Can we predict language learning beliefs, anxiety, and behaviors based on past language experiences?

As far as the results of the present study are

concerned, even though only roughly 8% of the participants had some overseas experience, the positive impact of overseas experience was found in the three strategies of Organization strategy, Guess strategy, and Media strategy and the students' average time of learning English outside the classroom, while ELES had no impact on all the strategies, except for Media strategy. Self-confidence beliefs were also affected by overseas experience. Anxiety was negatively affected by overseas experience.

Conclusion

Three important findings can be extracted from the present study.

First, the results of the categorical regression analysis reveal that we can predict Japanese EFL learners' self-confidence and the uses of strategies from their LG scores. Specifically, they are more likely to try to learn English in varied ways, while using different strategies than the students who score high in PG orientations.

Next, the results show that the students' experiences with ELES would not help us to predict their use of strategies in the future, the average time of learning English outside class when they became university students, and their anxiety (or self-confidence) level. In fact, MEXT (The Japanese Ministry of Education) from

the 2011 academic year, English language teaching in elementary schools was officially implemented. As far as the results of this study are concerned, ELES experience may not necessarily increase students' self-confidence in using English later on in life. Therefore, the government should invest more effort into developing the contents and teaching methodology in ELES in order to support students' will to study English.

Last, the results indicate that we can predict the students' use of multi-media tools (e.g., TV and movies) from their overseas experience. In addition, we can also expect that these same students would have less anxiety about using English abroad in the future. As can be seen from the results, self-confidence beliefs were positively affected by their overseas experiences, while students' future use anxiety was negatively affected by their overseas experiences. This indicates that the more overseas experience a student has, the more self-confidence they gain, and they feel less anxious about using English in the future. The self-confidence that emerged from their overseas experience possibly works against the fear of using English abroad in the future by requiring that their perceptions of their skills and abilities in English be high (or remain high).

Limitations

As Gardner et al. (1997) pointed out, there are limitations to asking participants to report their strategy use. Preferences of strategy choice vary a lot, and it is difficult to generalize the strategy inventory which would include those *specific* and *unique* strategies. Another feasible interpretation is that the frequency of using a certain strategy would not guarantee the increase (or decrease) of the results on standardized language tests. For example, when students use a certain strategy repeatedly, without really using their intellect, they will learn nothing. This is an issue that should be investigated further.

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Additional Notes

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