

Research Methods in Second Language Acquisition---An Application Test of Semi-structured Interview

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Abstract

This research paper reviews relevant literature concerning motivations for second language acquisition and possible research methods to this regard. This paper aims at exploring whether experimental research method could help discover Chinese students' motivation for foreign language learning. It finds out that with semi-structured interview as the research method, it would be easier for the respondent to express his or her opinions freely on his or her personal feelings of motivation for foreign language learning. Thus, experimental research methods such as a semi-structured interview could complement research in motivations for foreign language acquisition.

Keywords: Foreign language learning; experimental research methods; semi-structured interview.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this modern and globalized society, the role of English as a common language (as a lingua franca) for people from various cultural backgrounds to communicate as a medium has been increasingly important. A lot of Chinese students, in the meantime, have grabbed the opportunity to study abroad, either in English-speaking countries like the United States, the UK or non-English-speaking countries like Germany, France, Belgium, to name just a few.

No matter which country Chinese students choose as their destination to further their education, English as a lingua franca could never be ignored whether for academic purposes or for daily use. Also, for Chinese students studying abroad, their passion for studying English has never been diminished. What is more, due to reasons such as making friends, career, travel and etc, Chinese students are even more eager to study English not only to improve their own communicative ability but also to extend their potentials in this internationalized world. Moreover, for Chinese students who study in non-English-speaking countries like Germany, German also plays an important role in their studies and life.

Hence, research on the motivation of second language acquisition has always attracted people's

attention because studies in this regard could shed light on not only possible reasons for foreign language learning but also on foreign language teaching because teaching strategies ought to be altered or adjusted according to students' needs.

Studies in the motivation of second language acquisition have stretched out to different languages, for example, between English-Spanish, English-French and etc. Therefore, it would be interesting to look deeper into how students are motivated in learning foreign language. As a Chinese student once studied in Germany, I am especially interested in the situation that in Germany, whether Chinese students' motivation towards studying English and German differs. Therefore, I would like to investigate this topic in depth.

In this paper, I would first review the related literature concerning the topic. The literature review would include motivation to second language acquisition and qualitative research in applied linguistics with interview as the focus. Then, I would introduce my own study including data collection and data analysis. The last part of the paper would be a summary of my own study and an outlook for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Motivation to Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition refers to the ability to learn a second language. Ortega (2013: 2) defines it as

“The scholarly field of inquiry that investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during the late childhood, adolescence or adulthood, and once the first language or languages has been acquired”.

This definition indicates that second language acquisition is about learners’ situation in acquiring a new language. Research into second language acquisition covers a variety of areas.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, motivation refers to the willingness, the enthusiasm and the need or reason for doing sth. (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/motivation>). Gardner (2010: 10) defines motivation as “a very broad-based construct that has both cultural and educational components when applied to the language learning situation. It has cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics, and the motivated individual demonstrates all facets”. As cited in Oroujilou and Vahedi (2011: 995), with regard to the second language learning context, motivation is “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (Gardner 1985: 10). According to Crookes and Schmidt (1991) (cited in Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011: 995), motivation is regarded as the learner’s orientation to the goal of learning a second language. And Ortega (2013: 168) explained motivation as “the desire to initiate L2 learning and the effort employed to sustain it”.

Integrativeness, orientations, and attitudes are the three central focuses in terms of L2 motivation research (Ortega 2013). As stated by Lennartsson (2008) (cited in Oroujilou and Vahedi 2011: 995), if students do not believe that they are able to achieve success in a new language, this belief would become a barrier in their new language acquisition. A more motivated learner would be more eager to engage efforts in language learning. Hence, it is not hard to imagine that motivation, attitudes, and beliefs could influence students’ learning efficiency and language proficiency.

According to Ortega (2013), there are several most common orientations for L2 language learning: instrumental reasons; integrative reasons; knowledge; travel; and friend. As the last three orientations are easy to understand, I would here explain the first two orientations. Instrumental orientation refers to a student or a foreign language learner who likes the culture and is willing to get along with and even integrate with

people and the context in which the language is spoken (Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011: 996). Integrative orientation indicates the “desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language” ((Hudson 2000), cited in Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011: 996). People who are instrumentally motivated have more utilitarian aims, for example, translation work, seeking promotion or job opportunity based on language abilities and skills, fulfilling university requirements and etc. Both integrative and instrumental motivations are important factors in language acquisition and learning, integrative motivation, however, has been more emphasized “to sustain long-term success when learning a second language” (Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011: 996). Gardner (2001) regarded that integrative motivation is the “highest and most facilitative form of motivation” (Ortega 2013: 171).

One point worth noting is that social context plays an important role in determining which direction is more important and how the learners oriented are. According to Lukmani (1972) (cited in Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011: 996), to female learners of L2 English in Bombay, compared to integrative orientation, instrumental orientation is more stressed. Brown (2000) (cited in Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011: 996) stated that instead of selecting one motivation when learning a second language, learners’ motivations are usually a combination of integrative and instrumental motivations.

In measuring attitudes and motivation towards language acquisition, one method that has been widely adopted and proved trustworthy and credible is the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB for short) (Gardner 2010). It is used to “measure the major affective individual difference variables” (Gardner 2010: 107). According to Gardner (2010), the AMTB included items about integrative orientation, attitudes toward English speaking people, interest in foreign languages, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation, motivational intensity, and desire to learn English, attitudes toward learning English, language anxiety, instrumental orientation, and parental encouragement.

2.2. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research is useful because the participants can explain their experiences and ideas during the research. This character of being exploratory could, according to Croker (2009), help the researchers explore new inspirations and even generate new theories. In quantitative research, the researcher collects “primarily numerical data” (Croker 2009: 5) while the researcher conducting qualitative research collects “primarily textual data and examining it using interpretive analysis” (Croker 2009: 5). Mixed methods research is a combination of adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods.

According to Croker (2009), qualitative research is widely adopted in different disciplinary areas, for example, sociology, applied linguistics and etc. Research approaches developed within qualitative research include “narrative inquiry, case study, ethnography, action research, phenomenology, and grounded theory” (Croker 2009: 5). Hence, data collection methods such as interviews, observation, discourse analysis have been employed. This paper will focus on the interview as a method of looking into Chinese students’ motivation to second language acquisition.

As a data collection method in qualitative research, interviews can be adopted in case studies, ethnography, narrative inquiry and etc because it can help the researchers to “probe beneath the surface of things and focus on the nature of experience” (Keith 2009: 183). Keith (2009: 183) further quoted Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2) to confirm his statement, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Keith 2009: 183).

By conducting an interview, researchers try to explore the interviewees’ ideas and views because the interview is often described as “‘conversation with a purpose’, ‘professional conversation’, ‘and the goal standard of qualitative research’” (Keith 2009: 183, 184). According to Keith (2009), interviews can be divided into three types: the structured interview, the open interview, and the semi-structured interview.

A Structured interview is a “spoken questionnaire” (Keith 2009: 186) with exact and pre-designed questions. The interviewer usually follows the interview schedule precisely. In this way, the answers from the interviewees can be comparatively analyzed. A structured interview is often conducted when “it is impractical to use questionnaires or where the return rate of questionnaires would be likely to be very low” (Keith 2009: 186). Also, open interview stands on the opposite side of structured interviews because in an open interview, questions are not pre-designed and the interviewer does not necessarily follow a schedule. As noted by Keith (2009), an open interview is aimed to explore the interviewees’ feelings, opinions and experiences as deeply as possible. Also, compared to the structured interview that the interviewer leads the conversation, the direction of an open interview is in large part determined by the interviewee. Keith (2009: 186) also pointed out that a good relationship between the interviewer and interviewee should be set up at the beginning of an open interview.

The disadvantages of an open interview are apparent. With no given schedule to follow and no pre-determined questions, the interviewer may easily lose control of the conversation once he or she has a

communication problem with the interviewee. Also, it might take the interviewer a long time to get to the point he or she wants and there would also be analytical problems including long-time transcribing and coding. As stated by Keith (2009: 187), “The nature of the open interview makes it not only difficult but dangerous to pursue particular issues in the interview for the purposes of comparison because this can interfere with the natural development of the interview and lead to analytical distortion”. Keith (2009) explained that in this context, “analysis is not a matter of digging for data but exploring the respondent’s understanding through a careful and sensitive reading of the interaction” (Keith 2009: 187). Hence, to analyze data yielded from open interviews, sophistication is highly demanded.

A semi-structured interview can be regarded as a combination of a structured interview and open interview. A semi-structured interview is usually based on a guide, identifying questions need to be asked and topics ought to be referred to. The interviewer should be prepared to “allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions where these open up important new areas” (Keith 2009: 186). The interviewer should be capable to make the interview develop in a natural way so that the interviewees would feel that they are taking part in a conversation “with a purpose” (Keith 2009: 186) instead of simply answering questions.

2.3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Quantitative research, with questionnaire as the focus, has been used in investigating motivation to second language acquisition. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) used the mini- Attitude Motivation Test Battery to look into teachers’ language teaching strategies on students’ English learning motivation and language achievement in Catalonia, Spain. 31 English teachers and 694 students made up the participants of the research. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) found out that while teachers’ use of motivational and traditional strategies was not necessarily related to their students’ English achievement and motivation, students’ perception of these strategies has contributed to their learning attitudes and motivation whether individually or during classes. Another finding was that students’ motivation towards English learning could be predicted by instrumental orientation, integrative orientation, and their attitudes towards the learning environment. Motivation plays the role of positively predicating English progress, however, negative predictors include language anxiety and attitudes toward the learning situation.

Özgür and Griffiths (2013) conducted a research on the relationship between students’ motivation with L2 (English) success in a private Prep school in Istanbul using a questionnaire. They found out that students’ main motivation for studying English was for employment. Personal satisfaction ranks the top motivator. Extrinsic motivators such as parents and the

school have contributed to their English learning success. Also, through adopting the method of a questionnaire, Ghazvini and Khajepour (2013) found out that in Iranian high school, girl students are motivated more integratively while boys more instrumentally. Also, in English learning, girls hold a more possible attitude.

Apart from quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods, for example, the interview has also been employed to investigate motivation to second language acquisition. Li (2006) conducted a study on Chinese students' motivation to learn English by conducting semi-structured interviews. The 4 participants were aged between 24 and 40, they had different experiences of learning English and were studying majors including Social Sciences, Science or Engineering with one of them as an exception who studied English major. For all the 4 participants, this was their first time in the UK and also in an English-speaking country. Li (2006) located the four participants through his own social network.

The four Chinese students were interviewed by Li (2006) during their first year in the UK for two times in order to find out the change in their motivation in learning English. As Li (2006) was aware that "potential problems associated with self-report data and the potential weakness of the lack of triangulation" (Li 2006: 43), he designed a two-stage data collection procedure to minimize the problems.

The first round of interview was two or three months after the respondents' arrival in the UK and the second round of interviews took place at approximately the end of the respondents' one-year study. This could ensure that the interviewees had a similar starting point and could allow "the generation of rich data and the examination of the dynamics of motivation in these respondents over time" (Li 2006: 43). Therefore, the second round of interviews was used as a confirmation of data for the first round. The two rounds of interviews were conducted in Chinese, the respondents' mother language. The respondents were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences in learning English and were encouraged to explain their opinions in detail so as to initiate new areas of topics.

Li (2006) concluded that qualitative research can complement insights from quantitative methods. Findings were that believing learning English really important, students would set learning goals and try to reach them. They were mainly instrumentally and extrinsically oriented. The students regard language environment as a supportive factor of attaining their goals and they think that their attitudes towards the British people would exert different effects on their English learning motivation. Li (2006) also found out that students' self-perceived progress can help increase their learning confidence and motivation. What is more,

when explaining the reasons for the language learning success and failure, the interviewees tend to attribute the former to "stable causes such as environment" (Li 2006: 51) and the latter to "unstable but controllable causes such as effort" (Li 2006: 51).

While Li (2006) conducted a research on Chinese students in England, Hong and Ganapathy (2017) set their study in Penang, Malaysia. To investigate whether ESL students are integratively or instrumentally motivated towards English language learning and the problems that might affect ESL students' language learning motivation, Hong and Ganapathy (2017) conducted qualitative research concerning 12 secondary school students' instrumental and integrative motivation using group interviews.

The discussion questions from Hong and Ganapathy (2017) were adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The 12 students were divided into three focus groups to compare and validate the data. The participants were asked to discuss research questions. According to Hong and Ganapathy (2017), focus group discussion can "encourage yielding information from a group of people in regards to their opinion and perceptions regarding a certain topic (Marshall, 2010)" (Hong and Ganapathy 2017: 23).

Hong and Ganapathy (2017) found that compared to integrative motivation, students are more instrumentally motivated and vocabulary and grammar are the most important aspects for students in their ESL learning. What is more, students' perceived success could contribute to the improvement in English proficiency.

Hong and Ganapathy (2017) pointed out the limitation of their research. Firstly, their research is a case study on a small scale whose results cannot be generalized because the participants come from the same secondary Chinese school in Penang. Secondly, certain variables including family background, learning environment, number of languages spoken and so forth were not taken into consideration because the study focused only on instrumental and integrative motivation towards English learning. Last but not least, they were aware of certain biases in the process of data collection due to the differences in subjectivity and cultural backgrounds.

The above two studies employed a single method in the motivation towards English learning. This does not mean that research in second language acquisition contains is only about English, other languages could also be the research object. To look at students' motivation towards language learning in depth, Busse and Walter (2013) conducted longitudinal research on first-year students who studied German as a foreign language at two British universities by adopting

the mixed-methods approach. Their aim was to explore the change of students' language learning motivation and the development of capability beliefs attributed by time and context. They found out that although the students are willing to be more proficient in German, they tend to engage less effort into language learning with the course of time.

All participants are aged between 18 and 20 years old. The number of female students is more than that of male students. Among all the 59 participants, most of them were of British origin with English as their first language. The entire research includes two parts, first a questionnaire study at the beginning of the academic year and a voluntary interview as a follow-up method. Questionnaire items for the study covered the following areas: wish for language proficiency; intrinsic motivation; self-efficacy; effort; and motivational state. In terms of the follow-up interview, Busse and Walter (2013) employed a semi-structured interview. Interview questions were designed to capture motivation and motivational change from the students' perspectives.

Results showed that self-efficacy for writing, listening, and speaking is of great importance. When students' effort into language learning declines, intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy beliefs would also experience a decreasing trend. Also, intrinsic motivation, the desire to be proficient in the language and students' self-perceived effort are interrelated with each other. Generally, compared to the school time, there is a declining trend in students' self-efficacy beliefs for listening and speaking and in their intrinsic motivation over the first year of the university. The respondents attributed this decline to "the lack of opportunities to engage actively with the language" (Busse and Walter 2013: 444). What is more, perceived progress leads to students' increasing motivation at the university level, while perceived lack of progress could cause decreasing enjoyment and low motivation. This is in line with Hong and Ganapathy's (2017) research finding.

The interviewees pointed out that their lack of progress is not only because of their insecurity of listening and speaking ability but also due to their decreasing enjoyment in learning German. They attributed the perceived lack of progress to the "the scarcity of language input provided by the university environment" (Busse and Walter 2013: 445), by which they refer to the lack of language tuition and oral practice, which exerts a negative impact on their language learning motivation. Respondents felt that language tasks at university are demotivating so they tend to seek chances to improve their German language proficiency by engaging in extracurricular rather than instructional activities. Moreover, Busse and Walter (2013) found out that the more language input, the more progress the students achieve and this will bring about more enjoyment and higher motivation. Although

hardly did the respondents mention whether their language teachers at university played a positive role in their learning enjoyment and motivation, they quite frequently talked about the fact that German studying interest and enjoyment come largely from their teachers at school.

With regard to the limitations of the study, Busse and Walter (2013) are aware that first, the research is a rather small-scale study. Second, the research concentrates on German language only. Hence, although their study could provide possible implications in terms of pedagogy, Busse and Walter (2013) pointed out that more research ought to be conducted to generalize the results.

3. RESEARCH GAP AND QUESTION

The review conducted above reveals the potential of analyzing students' language acquisition motivation in different aspects by adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods.

However, most research done in this aspect focuses on motivation in learning one language. Therefore, there is still space for comparative research on the difference between Chinese students' motivation to German and English language studying in a German language context. This study aims at filling this gap and figuring out the differences of motivation in second language acquisition in terms of learning English and German.

In light of the research gap, the present study would address the following research questions: How are Chinese students in Germany motivated in foreign language acquisition?

What are the differences in terms of motivation to second language acquisition among Chinese students in learning English and German in Germany?

Based on the results from the previous research reviewed in the above section, the research hypothesis is that for Chinese students whose language of instruction is German, they would be more instrumentally motivated in German language study and integratively motivated in learning English. For those whose language of instruction is English, they would be instrumentally motivated in learning English and integratively motivated in learning German.

4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data Collection

Based on the previous literature review, one interviewee, a friend of a friend, was invited to my semi-structured interview because the method of choosing a friend of a friend is "a well-documented fieldwork strategy" (Li 2006: 46). An interview guide

was designed before the interview to keep it focused, but there was also space for the interviewer to interact with the interviewee, so as to explore more potential in motivations of second language acquisition.

The first reason for only conducting one interview is that I want to find out whether a semi-structured interview would be an applicable method for studying the motivation of second language acquisition. The second reason is that I would like to use this interview as an outset and pilot study for further research in this regard.

The interviewee is a PhD student at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. He finished his bachelor in China. He has been in Germany for nearly 10 years. He spent his first 2.5 years in Duisburg for his master studies, then 1 year at the University of Hamburg as a student assistant. He then spent four years in Bayreuth for his PhD. Table 1 and Table 2 provide the basic information of the interview and the interviewee. The name of the interviewee is a pseudonym.

Table-1: Interviewee's basic information

Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	Mother Language	Major	Other languages
San Zhang	male	Chinese	32	Chinese	High voltage direct current transmission	English (B2+); German (B2)

Table-2: Information for the Interview

Date	Place	Time	Language
13.08.2019	HuaXing Restaurant, Bayreuth	40 min	Chinese

The interview took place in a Chinese restaurant because I wanted to create a familiar environment for the interviewee so that the interviewee would not feel nervous, hence his language learning experiences could be explicitly explained and new topics could be generated. The interview lasted 40 minutes and was conducted in Chinese, the mother tongue for both the interviewer and the interviewee. It was fully recorded and transcribed. The transcript was sent back to the interviewee for correction.

What is more, due to the reason that the inspiration of this research comes from the one done by Li (2006), hence, the main questions asked by the interviewer are adopted from Li's (2006) research with certain adaptation. The original questions from Li (2006) could be seen in the appendix.

4.2. DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, the interpreted data will be analyzed in relation to different themes running through the interview.

The importance of English and German and motivational orientations

Compared to most Chinese students who start to learn English as a second language from primary school, the interviewee started to learn English in the kindergarten, because his mother works as an English lecturer at a university. He reported that he has always attached great importance to English language learning.

"During my bachelor studies, I was already preparing for furthering my studies in America or European countries like England or Germany. Being proficient in English is really important to me."

It is likely that this exerts a positive impact on the learner's language learning motivation. The interviewee also provided other reasons for attaching importance to English learning. He pointed out the insufficient English language instruction, especially in terms of 'English for specific purposes' at the university in China has encouraged him to put more efforts in learning English on his own because he was fully aware that accessing to American or European universities, communicating with professors, reading and writing or even publishing articles all require high English proficiency. These reasons given by the interviewee can be categorized under instrumental orientation.

In terms of motivation towards German studying, the interviewee stated both instrumental and integrative orientations, with instrumental orientation being the superior. He talked about how hard working he was in learning German upon his arrival in Duisburg. He could barely understand what other people talked about in German and he found it hard to express himself fully in German. This exerted a negative influence on his confidence in learning German. What is more, he had to do experiments and all the experiment reports were written in German. He had to answer every question in German and prepare everything in German. He said that at the beginning, he needed about one week to prepare for one experiment, otherwise, the professor would stop him from doing more experiments. Gradually, the preparation time reduced to approximately 2 days and he became increasingly more confident in speaking German. Also, he took German language courses, starting from A1 level in Essen after he arrived in Germany and now his German level is B2. When asked why he did not

continue to learn C1, he said that he thought it was not necessary.

After he came to Bayreuth, he also attended German language courses focusing on oral ability and skills. This, according to him, has helped him improved a lot in the German language. Because there was one topic for each session and the teacher would ask the students' ideas one by one, the students could discuss and debate with each other. To perform well in the class was his main motivation. He said he is now much more confident in speaking German and this has motivated him to engage in more German language activities. English is used when communicating with professors and colleagues. For integrative reasons, he said that it would be better for him to adapt to the local society when he communicated with shop assistants or neighbors in German. When talking to friends and colleagues, he would also prefer German because he thought this could be a good way for him to improve his German speaking ability.

Language-learning goals

In answering questions concerning goal setting, the interviewee pointed out that whether learning English or German, the main goal would be to communicate with local people and to achieve his studying goals. He felt that both his English and German improved after staying in Germany for so many years.

The interviewee set different goals for his German and English language. In the case of German, his goals changed with the course of time. When he first arrived in Duisburg for his master study, the goals were to understand the seminars held in German. Then, his focus turned to fluent communication with his German friends and colleagues. However, the goal for the English language has always been to fulfill his research project, whether during his master study or his PhD life. Hence, the goal for learning German switches from instrumentally oriented to integratively orient while the orientation for English keeps being instrumental.

Perceptions of the present learning environment

The interviewee's attitudes towards the current language environment are generally positive. As the interviewee complained about the lack of English/German instruction and speaking environment back in China, he felt that in Germany, there are quite a lot of opportunities for him to be exposed under a certain language environment, whether it is an English environment or a German environment. And these environments have motivated him to improve his language speaking ability, particularly oral skills in German. What is more, the German language courses he took offered him a systematic and structured classroom setting with professional instructions and teaching methods that are suitable to students' German language level. This finding is also in line with Li's

(2006) results that "the language-learning environment as relevant to their major needs and goals, which would help to sustain their motivation" (Li 2006: 48).

Attitudes toward German people

The interviewee holds both positive and negative attitudes towards German people. He thinks generally, German people are polite, serious and patient. But he also said that Northern Germans and their Southern counterparts are a bit different:

"I think people from the north are colder. When I was in Hamburg, the bus driver never said 'hello' to you first. And the bus would never wait for you. But here in Bayreuth, even the strangers you see on the street will smile and say hello to you first."

The interviewer said that he used English mostly in the laboratory or when he communicated with his professor. In most cases, he preferred to use German not only because he wanted to improve his speaking and oral skills, but also due to the language context:

"Sometimes I feel that they may not be that friendly if you speak English to them. My friend once wanted to extend his visa at the foreign affair office, and the officer there asks him to speak German."

This made him and his friends hold the attitude that some Germans are cold. But he also stated that this kind of situation is rare. He further pointed out that his motivation in improving his German ability also relates to the attitude of the German people.

"I feel that I would be more motivated if they are friendly. Once I lost my way and I asked a passer-by. I spoke really poor German but she appeared to be really patient and friendly. She told me how to get to my destination using easy words and sentences that I could understand. It was really a lot of help. I felt encouraged and confident."

Apart from the listening and speaking difficulties that have been analyzed at the beginning of this section, the interviewee talked about the issue of Chinese thinking model or the translation process, which correlates the findings of Li's (2006) research that Chinese students in England have also encountered this problem. The interviewee explained that this process would make him produce more complicated but non-native-like language, whether the target language is in English or German. However, this would not affect his learning confidence much.

Perceptions of success in learning English and German

In terms of the German language, the interviewee felt that much progress has been made in his listening and speaking ability. He reported progress in English with regard to reading, but not in other areas.

When asked about the reasons that could be attributed to such progress, he ascribed his German progress primarily to the German language context, and English progress to his research project. He also mentioned that his hard working and learning ability have contributed to his language progress. He said that he had formed a structured learning habit since young and is capable of achieving a balance between his language study and daily life. This result, however, is in contrast with Li's (2006) research where none of the Chinese students "mentioned ability as a cause either for success or failure in their English". Li (2006) stated that this could be explained that being modest instead of "boasting one's own merits and talents" (Li 2006: 54) is a traditional collectivism value. The reason for this difference might be that the interviewee in our present study has stayed many years in Germany and is gradually influenced by the western individualism while the respondents in Li's (2006) research have been in England for only one year, thus their thinking model is still collective, but it can also due to subjectivity and individual difference. Therefore, this result definitely requires further research for validity.

4.3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the analysis in the above section, it is not hard to find out that the interviewee is motivated in both German and English language learning in a German-speaking context. Generally, the motivation for learning German is higher than that of the English language. In terms of German language learning, the interviewee is oriented both integratively and instrumentally, which goes in line with Brown (2000) (cited in Oroujilou & Vahedi 2011)'s finding that the motivations of the learners are usually a combination of integrative and instrumental motivations. The progress of the interviewee's German language ability is influenced by several factors: the environment, confidence, language learning goals and etc. As for his motivation in English language learning, he is more instrumentally oriented because he uses English for his research project and to communicate with his professor, but not much in his daily life.

Also, certain limitations of the current study could not be ignored. First, due to the reason that there is only one interviewee in the present research, the results concluded in this study cannot be generalized because different students may have different attitudes and motivations towards foreign language (English and German) studying. Second, the setting of the interview was in a Chinese restaurant, although it creates a relatively familiar environment for both the interviewer (me) and interviewee, there was noise from other customers and the background music. This may have exerted a negative effect on the interviewee. Third, as the current study is an application test on whether the semi-structured interview is a suitable data collection method in researching motivation to second language acquisition, although it proves that it can indeed

generate rich data, much time and efforts have to be put into to transcribe and analyze the data.

5. CONCLUSION

The current paper first reviews relevant literature in terms of motivation to second language acquisition and certain research methods. Then the paper focuses on the application test, which can also be seen as a pilot study for future research in this regard. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, which provides the interviewee with an opportunity to express his own ideas and experiences in detail and in depth. This application test shows that semi-structured interview as a research method is of great help in looking into learners' motivation towards second language learning.

However, in light of the limitation of the current study in section 4.3., there are certain outlooks for further research: Firstly, in terms of investigating learners' motivation to second language acquisition, instead of adopting solely quantitative method like questionnaires or qualitative method like semi-structured interviews, mixed methods could be employed to ensure the validity of data. Secondly, the number of interviewees has to be enlarged. As the answer from the interviewee would contain his or her own subjectivity and thus influence the results, one interviewee is far from enough. Hence, at least 4 to 5 interviewees as respondents should be invited for future research in this regard. Also, a mixed-methods approach could better explore learners' language learning motivation. The mixed-methods approach can be a questionnaire with AMTB as the research instrument and an interview as a follow-up method. Thirdly, a restaurant is not an ideal place for an interview. Quieter places like a classroom or the discussion room in a library could be chosen to hold an interview. Last but not least, in the current study, the interviewee attributed his language progress partly to his hard work, which goes against Li's (2006) study that Chinese research students in the UK barely mentioned their ability as a cause to language achievement. This result can be a starting point of looking into whether the time of being in one country can affect people's individualistic or collective thinking model and thus influence one's motivation towards foreign language learning.

6. REFERENCES

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7. APPENDIX

- Do Chinese students think it is important to learn English and German? Why? Do they set language learning goals? What goals do they have?
- What are their perceptions of, or attitudes towards, the present learning environment as compared with their previous learning Environment in China?
- What are their attitudes towards British people?
- What impact does their perceived support have on their motivation to learn?
- What are the difficulties they encounter and how confident are they of their English?
- How successful do they think they are in learning English and how do they attribute their success or failure?
- (Exerted from Li, Daguo. (2006). *Motivation in Second Language Acquisition in Chinese Research Students in the UK*. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 19 (1), 38-58.)