Predictors of L2 attitudes and motivational intensity:
A cross-sectional study in the Saudi EFL context

Musaad Rashed M Alrahaili
Previous qualifications (BA, MA)

Faculty of Education and Arts
School of Humanities and Social Science
The University of Newcastle, Australia

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of doctor of philosophy

October, 2013
Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signature

Musaad Alrahaili

11 October 2013
ABSTRACT

The present research investigated the relationships among four factors: predictors of second language (L2) attitudes, L2 attitudes, motivational intensity and actual learning efforts. The research aimed at achieving five objectives. The first one was to establish what L2 attitudes exist among Saudi learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in relation to: a) English and its speakers; and b) issues associated with the teaching/learning of English, such as the textbook, the learning of English in the classroom and the teacher himself/herself. The second objective was to investigate whether participants’ demographic background had an impact on the two categories of learner attitudes. The third objective was to identify the factors responsible for the formation of existing L2 attitudes—again in two separate categories: a) socio-psychological constructs like in-group identification, para-social contact, in-group contact and perceived out-group threats as predictors of L2 learners’ attitudes towards English and the English-speaking communities; and b) learners’ beliefs about language learning as predictors of attitudes toward the learning situation. The fourth objective was to establish the extent to which learner attitudes affect learners’ motivational intensity (i.e., intended learning efforts) and by extension learners’ actual efforts. The research also addressed the issue of the salience of the English speaking community—the target language group—for learners of English in Saudi Arabia.

Research data from 510 male and female university students was collected via a dedicated questionnaire from three campuses of Taibah University across Medina region. A range of statistical procedures were used to analyse the data including factor analysis, reliability analyses, descriptive analyses, one way ANOVAs, correlation analyses, repeated measures analyses of variance, t-tests analyses, regression analyses and path analyses.
This research found that Saudi EFL learners have essentially positive attitudes towards English and its speakers, and towards the learning situation, but are generally opposed to accepting the target language group’s social and religious values.

This research established that five predictors have significant effects of varying strength on L2 attitudes: in-group identification, para-social contact, in-group contact, intergroup threat and beliefs about language learning, thus extending the theoretical scope of Stephan & Stephan’s (1996) Integrated Threat Theory to the domain of L2 attitudes. Learner attitudes, in turn, were found to be related to both intended and actual learning efforts, although with many of the research participants intended efforts were not necessarily reflected in actual efforts. Overall the research findings demonstrated that the target language group remains salient for Saudi EFL learners. These results suggested that, despite the recent push towards conceptualising L2 motivation from the social psychological perspective (Gardner, 2010) to the L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009), the links between social psychology and applied linguistics remain significant for predicting L2 attitudes and L2 motivation.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my principal supervisor, Dr Christo Moskovsky, whose expertise, support, guidance and input contributed substantially for the production of this thesis. I would like to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to my co-supervisors Dr Stefania Paolini and Dr Silvia Ratcheva for their support and guidance in relation to all aspects of this research project. Without the continuous support and guidance that I receive from my supervisors, this research will have been impossible to achieve.

Second, I would like to place on record my thanks to the administrative staff at Taibah University for permission to collect the data from Taibah University campuses. My sincere thanks also go out to my research participants who kindly and voluntarily accepted to participate in this project. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to my nieces (Amal Ali, Bashair Ali and Mona Ali) who kindly have managed to administer the questionnaires to the research participants at female campuses. I would like also to express my thanks to the teaching staff at the English language centre at Taibah University who were of great help for conducting the research.

Third, I would also like to thank my mother and my late father who have been always my comfort and support through my entire life. It is their unconditional love and encouragement that have helped me to complete this research. I also express my thanks to all my family members who have provided me with love and support. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my friends (Ms Amy LeBrocq and Dr Sylvie Graf) for their support and guidance. I would also like to extend my thanks to my colleagues at the Linguistics Department and the School of Psychology at the University of Newcastle for their support and assistance.
Finally, I acknowledge that this thesis would not have been possible without the financial support of Taibah University in particular and the University of Newcastle, Australia. I will take this opportunity to thanks the administrative staff at the Saudi Cultural Mission in Canberra for their assistance and support with issues of administrative nature.
Table of contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND ........15

1.1. Socio-economic background ................................................................. 15

1.2. Theoretical background: language planning and status of English ............... 18

1.2.1. Lack of English proficiency .............................................................. 20

1.2.2. English and Saudi social identity ...................................................... 21

1.2.3. Muslim clerics’ opinions about learning English .................................... 24

1.2.4. English as a threat ............................................................................ 27

1.3. Statement of the problem ....................................................................... 30

1.4. Objectives of the study ......................................................................... 33

1.5. Research theory .................................................................................... 34

1.6. Research questions ................................................................................ 36

1.7. Significance/Expected outcomes of the study ......................................... 36

1.8. Limitations and scope of the study ....................................................... 38

1.9. Glossary of terms .................................................................................. 38

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................ 39

2.1. Overview ............................................................................................... 39

2.2. Attitude: definitions, structures and functions ........................................ 40

2.2.1. Definitions .......................................................................................... 40

2.2.2. Theoretical models of attitude .......................................................... 42

2.2.3. Functions .......................................................................................... 45
2.3. Attitudes in second language acquisition .................................................. 47
2.4. Attitudes of Arabs in L2 contexts .............................................................. 49
2.5. Attitudes in the Saudi/Arab EFL contexts .................................................. 50
2.6. Gardner’s (1985) Socio-Educational Model (SEM) ..................................... 56
  2.6.1. Critique of SEM .................................................................................. 60
2.7. Attitudes towards English-speaking communities .................................... 62
  2.7.1. Prejudice ............................................................................................ 63
  2.7.2. Stereotype ......................................................................................... 64
  2.7.3. Social distance .................................................................................. 66
2.8. Predictors of L2 learners’ attitudes ............................................................ 67
  2.8.1. In-group identification ................................................................. 67
  2.8.2. Intergroup threats ........................................................................... 69
  2.8.3. Intergroup contact/para-social contact ......................................... 72
2.9. Predictors of attitudes towards learning situation ........................................ 73
  2.9.1. Horwitz’s research model .............................................................. 74
2.10. Attitudes and Behaviour (learning efforts) .............................................. 76
  2.10.1. A review of attitude-behaviour consistency ...................................... 76
  2.10.2. Behavioural intention (motivational intensity) .................................... 78
    2.10.2.1. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) ............................................ 78
    2.10.2.2. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) ....................................... 80
2.11. Conclusion ............................................................................................. 82
CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
CONTEXT, INSTRUMENTS, RECRUITMENTS AND PARTICIPANTS

3.2. Study setting ............................................................................................................. 84

3.3. Overview of the research instrument ...................................................................... 85

3.3.1. Questionnaire design and its development ........................................................... 86

3.3.2. Translation of the questionnaire ............................................................................ 88

3.3.3. Piloting the questionnaire ..................................................................................... 89

3.4. Participants’ recruitment .......................................................................................... 89

3.5. Participants ................................................................................................................ 91

3.5.1. Gender and age ..................................................................................................... 92

3.5.2. Campus .................................................................................................................. 92

3.5.3. Type of public school ............................................................................................ 93

3.5.4. Participants’ parents’ levels of education ............................................................... 94

3.6. Independence of demographic variables .................................................................. 96

3.7. Chapter summary ...................................................................................................... 97

CHAPTER 4: PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS AND PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF RESEARCH MEASURES .................................................................................................................. 98
4.1. Overview ................................................................................................................. 98
4.2. Data Accuracy Checks ......................................................................................... 99
4.3. Construct Validity Checks ................................................................................... 99
4.4. Reliability and Normality Checks ......................................................................... 100
4.5. Research measures and their psychometric properties ....................................... 103

4.5.1. Measures of L2 learners’ attitudes ................................................................. 104

4.5.1.1. Attitudes towards English-speaking people ............................................. 104
4.5.1.1.1. Prejudice ................................................................................................. 104
4.5.1.1.2. Stereotype ............................................................................................... 107
4.5.1.1.3. Social distance ....................................................................................... 109
4.5.1.2. Attitudes towards English .......................................................................... 112

4.5.1.3. Macro indices of Attitudes towards English and the English-speaking people ........................................................................................................ 114

4.5.1.4. Attitudes towards learning situation ......................................................... 116
4.5.1.4.1. Attitudes towards the English teacher ................................................ 116
4.5.1.4.2. Attitudes towards the English textbook .............................................. 118
4.5.1.4.3. Attitudes towards learning English in the classroom .......................... 119
4.5.1.4.4. Macro indices for attitudes towards the learning situation .............. 122

4.5.2. Predictors of L2 learners’ attitudes ................................................................. 123

4.5.2.1. Intergroup threats ....................................................................................... 123
4.5.2.1.1. Macro indices for intergroup threats .................................................. 126

4.5.2.2. In-group identification ............................................................................... 127
4.5.2.2.1. In-group identification with Saudis .................................................... 128
4.5.2.2.2. In-group identification with Arabs .................................................... 130
CHAPTER 5: L2 LEARNERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE TARGET LANGUAGE GROUP, THE TARGET LANGUAGE AND THE LEARNING SITUATION: DESCRIPTIVE AND GROUP DIFFERENCE ANALYSES...156

5.1. Overview............................................................................................................. 156

5.2. Attitudes towards English and English-speaking communities .................. 156

5.3. Results and discussion ..................................................................................... 162

5.3.1. One Way ANOVAs: Group difference along gender ................................. 165

5.3.2. One Way ANOVAs: Group difference along parents’ level of education ...... 168

5.3.3. One Way ANOVAs: Group difference along campus type ............................ 169

5.3.4. One Way ANOVAs: Group difference along schooling variable .................. 173

6.1. Overview............................................................................................................. 190

6.2. Predictors of Saudi EFL learners’ attitudes towards English, English-speaking communities and the learning situation................................................................. 193

6.2.1. In-group identification....................................................................................... 193

6.2.2. In-group contact............................................................................................... 195

6.2.3. Intergroup threat............................................................................................. 196

6.2.4. Para-social out-group contact (exposure to English mass media)................. 198

6.2.5. Learners’ beliefs about language learning (Horwitz’s BALLI) ...................... 200

6.3. Results of the descriptive analyses..................................................................... 202

6.4. Simple linear regression...................................................................................... 209
6.4.1. Results of the simple linear regression analyses for openness towards the TL and the TL group ................................................................. 210

6.4.2. Results of simple linear regression analysis for out-group friendliness .......... 211

6.4.3. Results of simple linear regression analysis for attitudes towards the learning situation .............................................................................. 212

6.4.4. Results of simple linear regression analysis for religious closeness ............ 214

6.4.5. Results of simple linear regression analysis for co-education closeness ......... 215

6.5. Multiple regression analyses ........................................................................ 216

6.5.1. Openness towards the TL and the TL group .............................................. 217

6.5.2. Out-group friendliness ............................................................................... 218

6.5.3. Attitudes towards the learning situation ..................................................... 219

6.5.4. Co-education closeness ............................................................................ 220

6.5.5. Religious closeness .................................................................................... 221

6.6. Chapter summary .......................................................................................... 221

CHAPTER 7: PREDICTORS OF MOTIVATIONAL INTENSITY AND ACTUAL LEARNING EFFORTS .......... 223

7.1. Overview ...................................................................................................... 223

7.2. Predictors of motivational intensity and actual learning efforts .................... 225

7.3. Results of Descriptive Analyses .................................................................. 228

7.4. Regression analyses for intended efforts for learning English ....................... 230

7.5. Regression analyses for actual learning efforts. ............................................. 232
CHAPTER 8: RESEARCH OVERVIEW, PATH ANALYSIS AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

8.1. Overview

8.2. Saudi EFL learners’ attitudes towards English, English-speaking communities and the learning situation

8.2.1. Openness towards the TL group—Saudi EFL learners’ attitudes towards: a) the English language; b) the English-speaking-communities

8.2.2. Saudi EFL learners’ attitudes towards the learning situation

8.3. Attitudes towards English, English-speaking communities and the learning situation as a function of participants’ demographic variables

8.4. Language attitudes: its predictors and its effects on motivation intensity and actual learning efforts

8.4.1. Path analysis (mediation analysis) and decomposition effect

8.4.2. Impacts of predictors of L2 attitudes on motivational intensity and actual learning efforts via L2 attitudes variables

8.4.3. Effect decomposition

8.5. General discussion

8.5.1. Predictors of L2 attitudes

8.5.1.1. In-group identification

8.5.1.2. In-group contact

8.5.1.3. Para-social out-group contact
8.5.1.4. Intergroup threat ................................................................. 272
8.5.1.5. Beliefs about language learning ........................................... 274
8.6. Predictors of motivational intensity and actual learning efforts .......... 277
8.7. Salience of the TL group .......................................................... 279
8.8. Chapter Summary .................................................................. 280

Chapter 9: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ......281

9.1. Overview ................................................................................. 281
9.2. Summary of the research findings ............................................. 281
9.3. Theoretical implications of the research findings ....................... 283
9.4. Implications of the research findings for professional practice ........ 288
9.5. Limitations of the current research and recommendations for future research.... 291
9.6. Chapter summary................................................................. 293

References .....................................................................................296

Appendix A.......................................................................................357

Appendix B ......................................................................................387