Druze Minority Students Learning Hebrew in Israel: The Relationship of Attitudes, Cultural Background, and Interest of Material to Reading Comprehension in a Second Language

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This study investigated Israeli-Druze students' reading comprehension in Hebrew as a second language as related to their attitudes and cultural background and the interest of the material. The Druze are unique in Israel in being a cultural and linguistic Arab minority, but they are highly identified with the Israeli-Jewish destiny. Seventy-six Druze students participated in the study. They were administered attitude questionnaires, individual interest questionnaires, Arab and Jewish cultural stories and ten multiple-choice comprehension questions about each story. The results indicated strong positive attitudes towards learning Hebrew and towards Israeli society. However, the subjects revealed higher positive interest in reading the culturally Arab stories than the culturally Jewish stories, and their reading comprehension scores accorded with their preference. The conclusion is that cultural familiarity with text and readers' individual interest in text are related and essential variables in second-language learning. Thus, interest in reading is text-based, a fact that should be considered in minority education. In the case of the Druze minority in Israel, measures beyond 'self-reported questionnaires' are needed to validate the contradictions between their feelings and attitudes and their reading and interest scores.

Introduction

This study investigated social and cognitive factors and the way they affected reading comprehension in a second language in the Israeli-Druze social context. Attitudes, cultural background and individual interest of minority Druze students learning Hebrew as their second language (L2) were tested in relation to their reading comprehension in culturally related and unrelated texts presented to them in Hebrew.

The Druze social context is unique, yet it has rarely been studied. The Druze of Israel live in villages in the north of the country and fully identify with Israeli goals (Al-Sheikh, 1978; Ben-Dor, 1973). They perform compulsory service in the Israeli army and many go on to a career in the military. The language of instruction in Druze schools is Arabic, and Hebrew is taught as a second language.

The uniqueness of this social context is that the Druze are a minority group who identify with the majority group in their culture, language and politics (Ben-Dor, 1973). Yet they are considered an Arab conservative society and are treated as such by the Israeli authorities, and certainly not as a Jewish sector regarding budgets and civil rights. This study seeks the connection between the social attitudes, individual interest, and cultural background of these L2 learners

and their reading comprehension in culturally related and unrelated stories. This combination of social and cognitive factors is necessary in order to measure the relative contribution of cognitive as well as social variables in the process of L2 learning in the Israeli-Druze social context. Usually, cognitive psychologists study cultural background and its effect on reading comprehension as a separate domain, called schema theory. Similarly, attitudes towards L2 learning are also studied as a different domain with no connection to schema theory. Learners' individual interest also is usually studied separately from schema theory and from social attitudes. However, these domains merge in real life, and investigating them together in one study will give a more valid and reliable picture of the second-language learning process of the Druze minority in Israel.

The Israeli-Druze social context

About 40,000 Druze live in Israel in villages in the north of the country. They have always been an extremely secretive community. They are forbidden to reveal knowledge of their religion to outsiders. The Druze in Israel constitute a minority within a minority and, apart from the tiny Circassian community, they are the only minority which emphasises its wish to be integrated into Israeli society more than its desire to be united with the rest of the macro Arab community in the Middle East (Ben-Dor, 1973). They currently enjoy the status of an autonomous religious community, including the functioning of religious courts. The Druze serve in the Israeli army as an act of identification and sympathy with Israeli society and policy (Ben-Dor, 1973).

The Druze identity in Israel was tested by Al-Sheikh (1978). He tested five identities and four attitudes. The identities were: self-identity, family identity, Druze identity, Arab identity and Israeli identity. The attitudes were towards: Israeli citizenship, a Druze state, compulsory military service, and a Palestinian state. The results indicated that the identity of the Druze in Israel constitutes three sub-identities which can be hierarchically divided into a Druze identity, an Israeli identity and an Arab identity. Al-Sheikh (1978) argued that there was no conflict among these three sub-identities even though Israel and the Arab world were officially in a state of war. He claimed that the Druze were more Israelis than Arabs. He considered that the absence of conflict among these three constituents of Druze identity was related to their conforming with the laws of the State of Israel that made them Israelis. However, they were Arabs in terms of their language and culture, but not in terms of their emotions, principles or actions. Further, the participants revealed negative attitudes towards the establishment of a Palestinian State, but positive ones regarding the establishment of a Druze state.

Thus, although the Druze speak Arabic as their first language, and Arab culture is their culture, they do not emotionally sympathise with Arabic language and culture. But they sympathise, however, with the Israeli identity. This situation of a sense of shame regarding language and culture raises the question of how healthy the Israeli-Druze social context is for L2 learning. Denial of mother tongue and native culture for the sake of assimilation and acculturation in a new society and atmosphere has usually revealed harmful results in the minority members' learning process, motivation and self-esteem (Cummins, 1984, 1986,

1987; Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Landry, 1987; Landry, Allard & Theberge, 1991; Wong-Fillmore, 1991a,b).

This study tests social and cognitive variables with Druze minority students in the Israeli social context and how these variables affect their reading comprehension in Hebrew as a second language. These factors may cast light on the emotional and cognitive aspects of Hebrew learning among Druze minority students. In other words, students' feelings towards the Hebrew language and Israeli society are tested in relation to their understanding of culturally related and unrelated stories presented in the Hebrew language.

Overview of the literature

Social attitudes

Gardner & Lambert (1972) proposed a distinction between *integrative* motivation and *instrumental* motivation. The former indicates full identification by the learner with the target-language group and readiness to be identified as part of it. The latter indicates interest in learning L2 solely as an instrument to a better future and to social mobility; in this case the learner does not identify with the target-language speakers. Integrative motivation is usually considered more likely to lead to success in L2 learning than is instrumental motivation. Instrumental motivation is extrinsic and it stems from societal needs and environmental necessities. This notion complies with Bandura's (1986) and Zimmerman's (1989) view that learners who are aware of future benefits will gain more. There is now widespread agreement among social psychologists that the term *attitudes* should be used to refer to a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object or issue (Bern, 1970; Oskamps, 1977). Social educational models of L2 learning focus on the attitudes of the learners and the openness of the target-language group to L2 learners as important variables affecting the L2 learning situation (Gardner, 1985; Lambert, 1974; Schumann, 1986; Spolsky, 1989; Wong-Fillmore, 1991a).

Spolsky (1989) suggests that the attitudes of L2 learners appear as motivation, which joins other personal characteristics such as previous knowledge, capabilities, and personality. These combinations explain the use the learner makes of the available learning opportunities, all of which affect L2 learning. Clement (1980) also places great emphasis on the L2 learner's motivation and the cultural milieu. Clement's model, *primary motivational process*, is defined as the net result of two opposing forces, integrativeness minus fear of assimilation. Integrativeness refers to the desire to become an accepted member of the target group; fear of assimilation refers to the fear of becoming completely like the other culture and losing one's native language and culture. Fear of assimilation, of the loss of native language and heritage, may weaken L2 learning motivation. Likewise, Schumann (1986) suggests two aspects of the term *acculturation*, namely that the L2 learners integrate both socially and psychologically with the language and culture of target-language speakers. One of the conclusions derived from the above models is that minority L2 learners may succeed if the social context is supportive and inspires sufficient contact and receptiveness between members of the target-language group and the L2-learner group. However, a problematic social context usually affects L2 learning negatively, especially when the learners

are minorities learning L2 as the language of the dominant group. But if the learners are aware of the necessity of the L2 acquisition, this cognitive awareness positively affects their success even if it symbolises a conflict between the minority and the majority. L2 learners apply instrumental motivation, which operates as a meta-cognitive strategy whereby they persuade themselves to engage in L2 learning even though they have no liking for the language and the culture (Abu-Rabia 1991, 1993; Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989).

Gardner (1983, 1985) and Gardner & Lambert (1972) have suggested that integrative motivation is more efficient than instrumental motivation in second-language learning. Different results from different parts of the world have indicated the opposite, however, namely that *instrumental* motivation is more efficient (Abu-Rabia, 1991, 1993; Lukmani 1972; Rodriguez 1988; Snow 1988; Spolsky 1989). Thus, in the present study in the Israeli-Druze social context, two different definitions of integrativeness are suggested — in effect an expansion of the classical definition: (a) *indoors integrativeness*, which matches the classical definition of integrative motivation, in that the L2 learner identifies with the target language and its culture; (b) *outdoors integrativeness*, whereby the minority members wish to be integrated extrinsically in neighbourhoods and cities with the target-language groups, but not to identify with or be like them. This is a more multicultural orientation, which is more appropriate to explain the Israeli-Druze situation in Israel. In other words, minorities in Israel may wish to live with the Jews as the dominant cultural group, but keep their unique cultural identity. This is divergent from the classical definition of integrative motivation noted earlier.

The new operational definition for integrative motivation suggested here is more appropriate to explain the inner cultural life of Druze and their outside world view regarding their attitude to Israeli-Jewish society. This elaboration of the concept will prevent us from reaching the erroneous conclusions of Kraemer (1993) regarding Jewish students in Israel, namely that they possessed integrative motivation towards learning Arabic and interacting with Arabs. The questions representing integrative motivation asked by Kraemer were general and controversial, and may be considered instrumental questions. Thus, at the validity level of the integrativeness construct, Kraemer did not measure integrative motivation but instrumental; in terms of the new concept suggested in this study, Kraemer actually measured outdoors integrativeness, which is an advance on instrumental motivation.

Cultural background

Bartlett (1932) and Rumelhart (1984) argue that a schema is a store of perceived sensory information in the memory, which is an abstract representation of objects, events and experiences of real life in the human memory. Consistency and adaptation to an existing schema means understanding, and inconsistency generally means hindrance in the comprehension process. Bartlett (1932) argued that schemata were culturally regulated. Schemata could impede reading comprehension and memory; details which were inconsistent with one's schema were deleted, or transformed and rationalised to fit the existing schema in the memory. On the other hand, schemata can also play a facilitating role in cases where details are consistent with the reading content; here cognitive processing

occurs quickly without serious obstacles (Anderson, 1987; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

There is extensive evidence in support of the notion that the cultural background of readers affects their reading comprehension in cultural stories (Abu-Rabia, 1991, 1993, in press; Abu-Rabia & Feuerverger, in press; Anderson & Gipe, 1983; Baldwin, Bruckner & McClintock, 1985; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Gayle, 1987; Lipson, 1983; Zegara & Zinger, 1981). Thus, it seems that presenting Hebrew texts with culturally familiar content to minorities learning Hebrew as a second language would be a wise pedagogical practice, making the texts more interesting and comprehensible to them.

Interest

This is usually divided into two different conceptions, individual interest in a topic, and situational interest (Hidi, 1990). Individual interest is related to the interest of readers or learners in certain topics, subject areas or activities (Renninger, 1988; Schiefele, 1990). Situational interest is an emotional state aroused by situational stimuli (Anderson *et al.*, 1987; Hidi, 1990). The individual interest of readers is the focus of this discussion.

Researchers have defined individual interest as the relatively long-term orientation of an individual towards a type of object, an activity or an area of knowledge (Asher, 1980; Hidi & Baird, 1988; Renninger, 1988). Schiefele (1987) suggested that individual interest is a domain-specific or topic-specific motivational characteristic of personality, which is composed of feeling-related and value-related valences. Individual interest motivates the learner to read specific subject matter.

Complying with the above framework, Fransson (1977), and Benware & Deci (1984) showed that topic-interested students exhibit markedly greater conceptual comprehension of text content than do non-interested students. Fransson also showed that students who were more interested in a topic exhibited deeper processing of a related text. Using free recall and extensive interviews, Fransson found high-interest subjects made more connections, not only among different parts of the text, but also between what was read and prior knowledge or personal experiences.

In sum, it seems that the interest of readers is of great importance. Strong interest motivates them to be seriously engaged in reading texts, which results in high achievement. Thus, it would be a very successful endeavour if L2 learners read their preferred textual content rather than fixed curricula texts.

The present study

The present study aimed to explore the attitude of Druze students towards Hebrew as their L2, and the way these attitudes affected reading comprehension in the L2. It sought to suggest a new operational definition for the theoretical concept of integrative motivation that would give more detailed and controlled insight into the social attitudes of minorities towards L2 learning.

Furthermore, it was decided in this study that since second-language learning is a social phenomenon which is normally affected by the social context where it takes place, social and cognitive factors (attitudes, individual interest and

cultural background) should be studied in combination, not separately. The research study attempted to answer the following questions:

(a) What is the role of the Druze students' interest in reading comprehension in their L2, Hebrew?
(b) How does the cultural background of the Druze students affect their reading comprehension in culturally related and unrelated stories in Hebrew?
(c) What type of attitudes do Druze students possess towards Hebrew learning, and how do they affect their reading comprehension in it?

Method

Participants

Seventy-six Druze students aged 15–16 years, 40 males and 36 females, participated in this study. Participants were randomly sampled from two Druze high schools in the Haifa area in Israel. They were all trilingual (Arabic, Hebrew and English) and had studied Hebrew as a second language since third grade. They studied Hebrew five hours a week, and English as a third language four hours a week. The language of instruction at school was Arabic, their mother tongue.

Materials

Attitude questionnaire

The attitude questionnaire was used to test students' attitudes towards learning Hebrew as a second language. The questionnaire was based on the Likert scale and consisted of six concepts. Eight items represented *instrumental motivation* — for example, 'I learn Hebrew because I want to continue my academic studies in Israel', 'I learn Hebrew in order to promote my personal interests in the future', 'I learn Hebrew because I want to be able to read the daily Hebrew newspapers'. Five items represented *military-service purposes* — 'I learn Hebrew in order to serve in the army', 'I learn Hebrew in order to get a good rank in the army', 'I learn Hebrew because the army is my future', 'I learn Hebrew in order to adjust quickly in the army', 'I learn Hebrew in order to protect my country'. Four items represented *anxiety* — for example, 'I learn Hebrew in order to protect myself from Jews', 'I learn Hebrew in order to understand what Jews whisper about me'. Eight items represented *indoors integrativeness* — for example, 'I learn Hebrew in order to think and behave like Jews', 'I learn Hebrew because I like the Hebrew language', 'I learn Hebrew because I want people to think that I am a native Hebrew speaker', 'I learn Hebrew because I identify with the Hebrew speakers and their culture'. Five items were asked to represent *outdoors integrativeness* — for example, 'I am willing to live in a mixed city (Arabs and Jews)', 'I am willing to be a neighbour of a native Hebrew speaker (in the same building), 'I am willing to be a close neighbour of a native Hebrew speaker'. Another eight items were asked to represent the concept *attitudes towards learning situations* — for example, 'I like the Hebrew teacher', 'I participate in the Hebrew lessons', 'I happily do my Hebrew homework'.

Individual interest questionnaire

This was used to test students' individual interest in the reading topics. Thirteen statements were offered — for example, 'This story was interesting', 'I wish I knew more about this topic', 'I would be very glad to read something similar in my free time', 'I felt that this text was very interesting', 'The ideas of this text were very interesting'.

Cultural stories

Two cultural stories were presented in the Hebrew language, one Arab and one Jewish. The stories depicted some typical Jewish and Arab behaviours. The Arab story was selected from the writings of Jobran (1964), the Jewish story from the writings of Buber (1957). The stories were equal in length and academic difficulty as judged by a team of ten Hebrew teachers.

The Arab story by Jobran, called 'Sheik Abass', tells of a sheik whose people were afraid of his temper and cruelty. People worked in his fields without enough income to feed their families. The story goes on to show how Sheik Abass grows stronger and richer while his people become poorer and poorer, and they do nothing to change their miserable situation. As noted, this Arab behaviour is typical in some Arab societies.

The Jewish story by Buber ('Heavy Punishment') tells of a man who desecrated the Sabbath by mistake, because his wagon was overturned on the road and he could not get to the town before the holy Sabbath. The story continues to show a dispute between two rabbis about the judgment: one is severe, and the other is light. The Jewish behaviour in the story relates to the Sabbath and forgiveness in the Jewish religion. These values are known to almost all Jewish school pupils.

Multiple-choice comprehension questions

Ten multiple-choice comprehension questions were asked about each story. Five were asked at the level of explicit information and five at the level of implicit information. The stories and the questions were evaluated by a team of ten Hebrew teachers who taught at the intermediate and high school level.

Procedure

All participants received all tests in the following order: first they completed the attitude questionnaire, and then they read two cultural stories and answered the ten multiple-choice comprehension questions on each story. Each story was followed by an individual interest questionnaire. The cultural stories and the questions on them were presented in Hebrew, the second language of the students. Both questionnaires were presented in Arabic, the first language of the students. The entire experiment lasted about 90 minutes.

Results

Table 1 presents the attitudes of the Druze students towards learning Hebrew, and the results of measures of their individual interest in reading familiar and unfamiliar texts. The table shows that the students were instrumentally motivated and integratively motivated towards learning Hebrew.

When the mean score of indoors and outdoors integrativeness was compared with that of instrumental motivation, the difference was not significant. Further,

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of atitudes and individual interest ($N = 75$)

Variables	M	SD
Instrumental motivation	3.67	0.77
Outdoors integrativeness	3.41	0.99
Indoors integrativeness	3.84	0.82
Situational learning	3.96	0.93
Military service purposes	3.13	1.20
Interest of familiar text	3.12	1.02
Interest of unfamiliar text	2.33	0.95

Scale: 1 - strongly disagree; 5 - strongly agree

Table 2 Multiple regression analysis of reading scores as predicted by the independent variuables

Variables	R	R^2 change	SS*	F	P
Content of text	0.63	0.39	391.15	89.65	0.0001
Outdoors integrativeness	0.64	0.025	415.14	49.16	0.0001

* Sum of squares

attitude towards Hebrew learning situations was positive ($M = 3.96, SD = 0.93$). The difference between outdoors and indoors integrativeness was statistically significant $t(74) = -3.22, p < 0.002$, indicating that these two concepts measured two different phenomena. Further, Druze students showed significantly more interest in culturally familiar texts than in culturally unfamiliar ones ($t(74) = 4.93$, $p < 0.001$).

The story-reading results revealed that the Druze students performed significantly better ($M = 7.40, SD = 2.46$) reading the culturally familiar story than the culturally unfamiliar one ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.64$) ($t(74) = 11.06, p < 0.001$).

To test the contribution of the independent variables to reading comprehension, a multiple regression analysis was carried out. The independent variables were: instrumental motivation, two types of integrativeness, army purposes, learning situations, interest and types of text, familiar/unfamiliar. The regression analysis revealed that the strongest predictor was type of text, familiar/unfamiliar, which explained 39% of the total variance (Table 2). The second predictor was outdoors integrativeness, which explained 2.5% of the total variance. The other variables did not reveal significant contributions.

When individual interest scores were entered into the regression equation as a dependent variable, and attitudinal variables and type of text, familiar/unfamiliar were entered as independent variables, type of text, familiar/unfamiliar was the only significant predictor of individual interest, explaining 14% of the total variance ($R^2 = 0.14, F = 22.78, p < 0.0001$). The other variables were not significant. This indicates that learners' individual interest was text-based.

Discussion

The most important findings of this study are: (a) the Israeli-Druze minority students possessed positive instrumental attitudes as well as positive integrative attitudes towards the Hebrew language and its speakers; (b) familiar content of text facilitated reading comprehension; (c) the students were more interested in reading the culturally related text.

The Druze students possessed instrumental as well as integrative motivation. They expressed their will to live in mixed neighbourhoods with Jews and to identify and be like them linguistically and culturally. They also expressed instrumental attitudes, namely that learning the Hebrew language was a utilitarian measure. In other words, these results indicate a 'melting pot' orientation of the Druze minority of Israel. They seem to believe in linguistic and cultural assimilation in Israeli-Jewish society. These results contradict those obtained with the Arab minority sector in Israel (Abu-Rabia, 1991, 1993). However, they match other results confirming the existence of instrumental and integrative types of attitudes towards L2 learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lukmani, 1972; Rodriguez, 1988; Snow, 1988). Furthermore, the Druze students expressed positive military-service purposes for learning the L2 and expressed very positive attitudes towards Hebrew learning situations.

In other words, the social attitudes of the Druze students towards the Hebrew language were positive, as may be expected from a minority that fully identifies with the culturally dominant group. However, they revealed more individual interest in the culturally related text (Arab) than in the culturally unrelated text (Jewish), and reading results were consistent with their preference. These results confirm classical findings of schema theory (Abu-Rabia, 1991, 1993; Bartlett, 1932; Lipson, 1983; Rumelhart, 1984). Reading and interest results in this study indicate that interest in reading is text-based. The stronger the students' interest in reading a text, the higher the probability that they enjoy their learning activity. However, individual interest was not a significant predictor of reading comprehension, while cultural familiarity of text was, and this (type of text) was also a strong predictor of individual interest. These results enhance those results obtained by Hidi (1990), Hidi and Baird (1988) and Renninger (1988), that individual interest is related to specific topics. Thus, Druze readers found reading about their own culture more interesting and understandable than reading about Jewish culture. This indicates that familiarity of text and individual interest are related variables in the process of reading (Sadoski, Goetz & Fritz, 1993).

However, the present study also reveals contradictory results. The Druze students showed positive attitudes towards Hebrew and Israeli society, but these feelings were not significant predictors of their Hebrew reading comprehension. They also revealed significantly more interest in the culturally related text and performed accordingly, even though interest was not statistically a significant predictor of reading comprehension in Hebrew.

Results also showed that these students highly identified with the Hebrew language and its culture. These results may, however, be threatened by the 'self-reported questionnaire' assumption — i.e. the students may have reported what they *thought* they should report but not what they really felt. The individual interest and reading results contradict the attitudinal results. The students

expressed interest in the culturally Arab text more than in the Jewish one. They find themselves in conflict between loyalty to their Druze (Arab) culture and language and to the state of Israel; their struggle between these two options results in a sense of shame regarding their Arabic language and culture.

The results obtained by Al-Sheikh (1978) do not coincide with the present results. He found that there were three sub-identities of the Druze in Israel, which were not in conflict because the Druze were more Israeli than Arab. This is because the Druze conformed with the laws of the state of Israel, and were Arabs only in terms of language and culture, but not in emotions and principles. The interpretation of the Druze identity presented by Al-Sheikh is quite superficial and contradicts solid findings regarding culture and identity in minority education (Cummins, 1984, 1986, 1989; Cummins & Danesi, 1990). In contrast to Al-Sheikh's claims, the emotions of minority groups are strongly related to their culture; otherwise, they are labelled as ashamed of their language and culture.

One of the most important conclusions of the present study is that, even for minority students who perceive themselves as acculturated in the dominant majority group, enhancing L2 curricula with related cultural messages is still a relevant pedagogy (Landry *et al.*, 1991). Additionally, cultural content of text and individual interest of students in certain topics are important factors contributing to successful learning situations. Thus, at the level of policy making, designers should ensure that curricula are culturally familiar, relevant and interesting to the learners.

On the theoretical level, the results of this study indicate that psycho-educational models of L2 learning (e.g. Clement, 1980; Gardner, 1985; Schumann, 1986; Spolsky, 1989; Wong-Fillmore, 1991a,b) should consider students' interest and (cultural) familiarity of text as important factors affecting second-language learning in minority education (Cummins, 1986; Landry *et al.*, 1991).

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