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# Persistence Factors in Secondary School Additional Language Study

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## Abstract

The research reported here concerns the voluntary decision of New Zealand (NZ) students, at the end of Year 10, to continue or not to continue with their hitherto voluntary study of Japanese, commencing at the beginning of Year 9 (n = 546). This decision is taken to be a clear indication of persistence, one of three fundamental aspects of motivation, and was investigated in relation to student attitudes towards seven different dimensions of additional language (AL)\* learning and certain background variables. Analyses involved the validation of an attitude scale, multivariate testing for associations between persistence, attitude factors and certain background variables, including student ethnic background. Discussion of results included the positing of a multidimensional self-determinative orientation factor, comparisons with similar studies, practical implications and limitations.

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(\* The term AL is preferred to FL (foreign language) and L2 (second language) because of difficulties involved in distinguishing between the two latter terms in multi-lingual/-cultural societies.)

## Introduction

In recent years the study of Japanese has experienced an unprecedented growth in popularity in a number of countries of the Pacific Rim. In the 1990s, for example, the number of learners of Japanese at all educational levels doubled in Canada and trebled in the United States (US). In Australia the number of primary school children learning Japanese quadrupled and the number of final year secondary and tertiary Japanese learners more than doubled, ranking Australia second in the world, after Korea, in terms of total numbers of students at all levels learning Japanese. In NZ, too, secondary numbers doubled and rose by some 50 per cent across all three education sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary), ranking it third in the world in terms of learners of Japanese per capita. (The Japan Foundation, 2000)

At the same time, however, this remarkable growth in overall numbers studying Japanese has revealed two, related negative aspects. First, it has not been evenly distributed across levels of proficiency, but rather has been concentrated at the

beginner end of the learning spectrum. Second, it has also been associated with high rates of attrition or non-continuance. In the US, for example, attrition rates of 80 per cent and 50 per cent were recorded at tertiary and secondary levels respectively, while in Australia this problem has led to official doubt about the strategy of promoting earlier language study as a means of developing proficiency in the post-compulsory education sector (Lo Bianco 2000, p.11).

Since second language proficiency requires a considerable period of continuous learning integration before any significant 'pay-offs' can occur, it is clearly important to try to understand what learner characteristics and attitudes might be associated with perseverance in such a currently popular language choice as Japanese.

### **Design of the Study**

'Persistence' was operationalised in the NZ context as the decision of secondary school students, at the end of Year 10, to opt to continue their study of Japanese into the senior school Years 11-13. (The same students had studied Japanese voluntarily in Years 9-10.)

A stratified random sample was constructed based on eight different school types in the most populous city of both the North and South Islands. This yielded a final sample of 546, or 12 % of the relevant national population. Additionally, in half of the 25 schools making up the sample one average-ability class voluntarily studying either French or German was selected for inclusion in the study (n = 182) to explore whether findings were language-specific or not.

Next, heuristically based on relevant literature (Doernyei, 2001, 1994; Saito-Abbot & Samimy, 1997; Kraemer, 1993; Ramage, 1990; Baldauf & Lawrence, 1990) a questionnaire was developed consisting of certain background variables and a general attitudinal scale of 35 items, hypothesized as seven different dimensions (each represented with 5 items). (See Appendix 1.) This was then trialled in a sub-sample of representative schools, modified and administered in standardised form by trained class teachers. The final scale required responses to a five-point Likert Scale and presented items in non-labelled, jumbled sequence and included several distractor items.

### **Analysis and Results**

#### *Motivational Scale*

Reliability and validity for the general AL motivational attitude scale were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha item analyses and factor analyses of the components, summative component scores and split samples. Results indicated scale content validity (Hair et al. 1998: 117) after the removal of five items with unacceptable inter-item and item-total correlations (<.5 and <.3 respectively). A further five items loaded on factors that differed from the originally hypothesized components, two of which merged (Teacher; Classroom Practice – see Appendix 1), leaving six instead of seven. (See modified construct in Appendix 1.)

#### *Persistence and Motivation*

To assess the predictive strength of these components in relation to students' continuance or non-continuance with their AL study (both Japanese and French/German students, n = 728), logistic regression analysis was regarded as

appropriate after testing for multi-collinearity and statistically significant differences between the continuing and non-continuing groups (ANOVA,  $p < .001$ ). The six variables were entered into the analysis stepwise with results showing that three were included in the model (Instrumental Orientation, School Administrative Environment and Linguistic Self-confidence). The analysis indicated that a single factor only, Instrumental Orientation, was at all useful in predicting AL persistence, accounting for 50 per cent of 58 per cent of total variance and raising the percentage of correctly classified subjects from 63 to 81 per cent.

Thus, only one of the seven attitudinal variables originally posited appeared to be substantively involved in students' continuance-decisions and factor analysis revealed that this was also structured differently from the original component description (see Appendix 1), in that one item from the Instrumental list failed to meet the item reliability criterion (Item IS5) and two items switched from the Integrative to the Instrumental category.

#### *Persistence and Background Variables*

Six categorical, background variables were next selected for investigation; they included: *Gender*, *AL spoken at home*, *Parental AL knowledge*, *Socio-economic status (SES* – measured using an official Ministry of Education decile ranking system), *Location (city)*, and *AL studied in Year 10* (Japanese or French/German). These were crosstabulated with the decision to continue AL study after Year 10 in order to check for significant mean differences before entering them, together with the six attitude sub-scales, stepwise into a second logistic regression analysis. Five of the background variables yielded statistically significant differences ( $p < .01$ ), using Pearson Chi 2; the exception was the variable *AL studied at Year 10* ( $p > .15$ ), indicating that no systematic variation appeared to be related to choice of AL.

Logistic regression yielded a four-step solution. This model improved the classificatory power from 63.9 to 84 per cent; however, none of the background variables featured in the solution and overall results did not differ substantively from the first regression analysis in that Instrumental Orientation alone accounted for 81.4 per cent correctly classified.

#### *Student Cultural Background*

Afore-mentioned crosstabulations revealed that the Japanese learners differed in a statistically significant manner ( $p < .001$ ) from the French/German learners in relation to the two variables: *Student AL home background* and *Parental AL background*. With reference to the first of these it was found that the Japanese learner group was twice as likely to have grown up speaking a language other than English. In fact, out of the 230 students of Japanese in the sample who did have an AL background (316 did not), 148 (or some two-thirds) grew up speaking an East Asian language (Chinese or Korean). With the second variable (parental AL background) the same statistically significant trend was evident but not to the same salient degree, since around twice as many parents in the French/German group had an AL background in the sense of 'one parent's ability to speak an AL', when compared to the students themselves (Variable 1).

Data were explored further to see whether the noticeable East Asian background in the Japanese learner group had any influence on motivation, since anecdotal evidence

from classroom teachers indicated that students from East Asian home backgrounds often perceived that their learning of Japanese Kanji characters would be easier due to these characters' derivation from the Chinese writing system and some use of such characters in written Korean. ANOVAs revealed differences among the means ( $p < .01$ ) for five of the six attitudinal factors (see Appendix 1; Parental Attitude =  $p > .05$ ) of three groups within the AL students generally ( $n = 727$ ), namely: those with an East Asian language background, those with another non-English language background (e.g., Spanish or Gujarati) and those with English only.

Follow-up tests were then carried out to evaluate pairwise differences among the means, using Tukey's HSD test which controls the Maximum Experimental-wise Error Rate and which establishes the homogeneity of groups. Defining a substantive mean difference as .4 or above, two factors showed up as different for the East Asian and the English Only groups: Instrumental Orientation and Linguistic Self-confidence. The size of the mean differences between the East Asian and English-only groups was .42 and .54 respectively, in favour of the former indicating that the group mean scores differed on each motivational factor by about half of one Likert Scale interval. The same analysis was also carried out for parental AL background, with the same result. The same two factors were involved with the mean differences for both being .53, in the same direction.

Finally, to further explore the language background aspect, a second factor analysis was performed for the total East Asian language background group. No broad principal component differences were found, compared to the initial whole group factor analysis, the only fine differences occurring in the loadings for the Instrumental factor. These are the correlations of each variable/item with the factor – the higher the loading, the more representative the item is of the factor – and are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of Factor Loadings for 'Instrumental Orientation' in Factor Analyses 1 and 2*

<i>(Loading) Item Order in Analysis 1 (n = 728)</i>	<i>(Loading) Item Order in Analysis 2 (n = 148)</i>
(.761) One of the reasons why I am learning is so that one day I that I feel it may be helpful to me in my future communicate with the people job.	(.707) I want to learn Japanese can visit Japan and there.
(.745) I am studying Japanese because it can help me earn a lot of money in the future. Certificate.	(.691) Learning Japanese will qualification like School
(.651) I chose to learn Japanese because it may give me the opportunity to go on an exchange	(.676) (Same as Analysis 1.)

visit to Japan.

(.625) .....visit Japan and communicate with the money.... people there.

(.589) ....earn a lot of

(.521) ....to get a qualification like the School Japanese. Certificate.

(.578) I enjoy studying

(.513) I enjoy studying Japanese. future job.

(.471) ...helpful to me in my

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### Discussion and Conclusions

1. The study sought to incorporate a number of representative motivational components at both the ‘Learner’ and ‘Learning Situation’ levels (Doernyei 1994, p.280), in addition to the ‘Language’ level which traditionally has been dichotomised as ‘Intrinsic/Extrinsic’ or, in bi- or multi-cultural social settings, as ‘Integrative/Instrumental’ (Vallerand, 1997; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Gardner & Clement, 1990). Strictly speaking, these various components constitute ‘orientations’ that precede and help to arouse motivation proper which essentially comprises three main aspects: choice of action, persistence with it and effort expended on it (Doernyei 2001, p.8; 1999).

In relating six, factor-analytically determined orientations to persistence it was found that a single orientation alone was substantively involved, with a predictive value of 83 per cent. A clear problem thrown up by the analysis was the adequacy of its label ‘Instrumental’, since the inclusion of two typically Integrative/Intrinsic items, together with the ambiguity of Item IS3, revealed a clear tension between behaviours often treated as discrete, even contradictory, performed as either a ‘means to an end’ or ‘for cultural exploration / personal pleasure or satisfaction reflecting a positive disposition towards the AL native culture(s)’.

Relabelling the orientation as broadly ‘Pragmatic’ suggests itself along the common sense lines of ‘items that concern one’s practical, self-interest’; this term, however, has the disadvantage of being applicable, in ordinary usage, to purely instrumental gains, not necessarily connected with cultural empathy. A related, though possibly more explanatory term could be ‘Self-determinative’ which accords with the general Self-determination Theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory specifically addressed the fact that empirical evidence in general educational literature existed for a positive relationship between internal and external ‘regulation’ in learning, so that Integrative and Instrumental affective dispositions could be interpreted more meaningfully as a dynamic, unidimensional continuum. Situated at one end was an internalised form of motivation and at the other an external form, whereby an external form may become internal, if sufficiently self-determined..

2. A comparison of the above finding with three locateable studies of AL persistence in similar population samples, (see Table 2), was non-confirmatory in that two of these used only a general motivational construct in their investigations (although it

was found to have good predictive power )(Kraemer, 1993; Ramage, 1990) and, while the remaining study did specify both an ‘Integrative’ and an ‘Instrumental’ component, it found the latter to be non-predictive (Baldauf & Lawrence, 1990).

**Table 2**

*Summary comparison of three studies of AL persistence factors in secondary school students*

Author(s) Analysis	Location	AL(s)	Subjects	n	Variables studied	Best
predictors	used					
Kraemer linear (1993 structural relations causal modelling	Israel	Arabic	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	484	L background parental attitudes status of subject ethnoling. AL socio-pol. attitude political optimism learning situation AL attitude motivation final grade	vitality ability *
Baldauf & Chi 2 Lawrence (1990) ANOVA factor analysis discriminant function analysis	Australia	Japanese French Indonesian	year 8	426	ethnic backgrd. gender integrative M parental influence instrumental personal attributes teacher influence multicultural influence school administration	SES * * * M *

Ramage	US	French	level 2	138	M	*
discriminan		Spanish				*
(1990)					commitment	
function					learning	situation
analysis					parental attitude	
					parental AL	backgrd.
multiple					AL culture contact	*
regression					AL achievement	*

*(Key: AL = additional language; M = motivation.)*

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Interestingly, however, the main finding of a recent, combined re-analysis of two large-scale studies ( $\Sigma n = 8,593$ ) of Hungarian primary school pupils' motivation for learning ALs was very similar to the present study's (Csizer & Doernyei, 2005).

Using the multivariate technique of Structural Equation Modelling, they found that the single most important motivational factor was Integrativeness ( a positive outlook on L2 and its culture) and that it was strongly associated with Instrumentality (pragmatic incentives for L2 learning). Conceding that the centrality of Integrativeness was not easy to explain in the monocultural, Hungarian context, and that its subsuming of Instrumentality involved two very different variables (personal attitudes vs. practical incentives), the authors suggested a similar reconciliation to that proposed for the present study. They invoked Higgins' (1996) concept of 'self', proposing a broadening of the content domain of Integrativeness to include both variables under the general label: Ideal L2 Self. This concept was defined as comprising two aspects: an 'ideal self' (referring to the personal attributes one would like to possess, including a positive disposition towards L2 speakers) and an 'ought self' (referring to socially constructed and reinforced language attitudes, including the importance of the specific L2) (Csizer & Doernyei 2005, p.29-30). Generally, attitudes related to the 'ought self' were thought to involve Instrumentality more; however, if 'self-determined', or internalised, they would merge with the 'ideal self'.

Although the present study and that of Csizer & Dornyei are, of course, not strictly comparable, in that multiple AL study was compulsory for the Hungarian pupils and motivation proper was operationalised in terms of AL choice and 'intended effort' (2005, p.23), both studies' findings and their interpretation contain complementary elements: the Hungarian age cohort (12-13 years) would equate with Year 7-8 students in NZ; the present study's concentration on persistence represents the third aspect of the general motivation construct, the other two being involved in Csizer & Dornyei study; and the term Ideal L2 Self elaborates the similar term Self-determinative by emphasizing the possible social constructedness of certain language attitudes. (Certainly, in the Australasian context, the recent emphasis on the study of Asian languages, especially Japanese, by various government instrumentalities (Shackleford, 1996; Rockwell, 1995; Smith, 1994; Council of Australian Governments, 1994) could partly explain the juxtaposition of more practical incentives alongside more personal preferences.)

3. In the present study's exploring of the possible involvement of six background variables in persistence it was found that, in univariate terms (Pearson Chi 2,  $p < .01$ ), five of the variables showed a statistically significant difference: *Gender*, *Home AL*, *Parental AL*, *SES* and *City*. The sole variable clearly revealing no effect ( $p = > .15$ ) was *AL Studied* (Japanese or French/German), suggesting the possibly broader relevance of findings. Two of the comparable studies cited in Table 3 also referred to significant associations between persistence and *Gender* (Baldauf & Lawrence 1990, p.235-36) and *AL cultural/linguistic contact* (Ramage, 1990). The present study, however, found that in multivariate terms none of the five univariately significant variables contributed to the relevant logistic regression solution, suggesting that care needs to be taken to control for multi-collinearity, particularly where relatively large sample sizes are involved.

4. Further explored was the background variable of student East Asian ethno-linguistic background for Japanese students only, to test the hypothesis of whether their orientation would be more extrinsic/instrumental than that of the general sample, due to a perceived, possible, relative cross-language advantage in the recognition/learning of Kanji characters. Results of an additional factor analysis of attitudinal responses indicated clearly that this sub-sample did not differ substantively in this respect from the original total sample population; indeed, comparing factor loadings for the Instrumental/Self-determinative Orientation component, a mild reversal effect was evident, whereby Japanese students from Chinese-Korean backgrounds tended, if anything, to be more intrinsic/integrative in orientation. (See Table 2.) Follow-up analysis, using Tukey's HSD test also indicated there also indicated a mildly substantive effect for greater linguistic self-confidence and a self-determinative/instrumental orientation in the sub-set of Japanese students with an East Asian language background when compared with Japanese students with an English monolingual background. Such a finding would seem to be readily interpretable in terms of students' life-world experiences of multilingual communication.

5. In general terms, the enduring, strong interest both in multivariate analytical studies of AL learning motivation in numerous, different settings (Doernyei, 1999) and also in the multidimensionality of its components (Csizard & Dornyei, 2005; Gardner et al., 1997; Vallerand, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985) indicates increasingly the need for evaluative, comparative studies of actual item banks used in such studies, including attention to item numbers and their categorisation and comprehensibility relative to subject age (see, e.g., Csizer & Dornyei 2005, p.30; Baldauf & Lawrence 1990, p.247-48), since item selection and ensuing factor matrices are interrelated. (Doernyei, 2001, p.63) Additionally, in order to avoid obfuscating the constructs of motivation, affect and attitude, operationalisations of motivation proper (as simple engagement with an act, or as significant persistence in the engagement, or as the intensity/involvement/commitment of the engagement) (Schmidt et al., 1996; Doernyei, 1990; Julkunen, 1989) would be worthy of comparative attention, as would AL learning contexts themselves.

6. Present findings suggest also a number of likely, practical implications for AL learning/teaching practice and student retention, at least for the population studied. These include: giving equal value and importance to the practical, personal and intercultural benefits of AL study; increasing the learners' goal-orientedness and

autonomy (Littlejohn, 2001); and facilitating authentic intercultural communication. (See, e.g., Dornyei & Cziser, 1998: 211-13, for specific strategy suggestions.)

### Limitations

Finally, four limitations of the present study deserve comment. First, data derived from questionnaires will contain not only information about subjects' 'true' attitudes but also about their conceptions of an ideal self which, in turn, may be partly individualistic and partly cultural. (For this reason, findings from relatively large-scale quantitative studies, like the present one, are usefully complemented by a more qualitative, small-scale but in-depth approach.) Second, motivational research generally involves the inferential, causal problem: is factor M a cause or an effect of persistent learning, or is the relationship possibly dialectical? Third, for logistical reasons related to the sample's age, the number of items per component included in the attitude scale was relatively small (five). Fourth, specific to the study's sampling, it should be noted that the sub-sample of students studying either French or German was less systematically derived than was the case with Japanese students; likewise, while although the SES sub-sample was systematically derived, associated findings would seem to be less generalisable due to the fact that low-SES schools taught languages far less frequently at Year 10 than higher-SES schools.

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## Appendix 1

*Pre- and post-factor analytical attitude scale structures (n = 728)*

Code (Factor)	Heuristically derived scale components and items	Coded factor-analytically derived components and items
<b>CE</b>	<b>Classroom Environment/Experience</b>	<b>CETT</b>
CE1	In our Japanese (J) classes we have a variety of activities, including games.	TT3 (.777) CE1 (.724)
CE2	I generally find J lessons very interesting.	TT4 (.709)
CE3	In our J classroom we have a lot of	

	interesting resources and materials.	CE3 (.691)
CE4	In our J classes we have lots of opportunities to practise speaking J.	TT5 (.677)
		CE4 (.677)
CE5	The classroom in our school where J is taught is attractive.	CE5 (.593)
<b>IS</b>	<b>Instrumental Orientation</b>	TT2 (.565)
IS1	Learning J will help me to get a qualification like School Certificate.	CE2 (.484)
IS2	I am studying J because it can help me earn a lot of money in the future.	<b>IS/IN</b>
		IS5 (.761)
IS3	I chose to learn J because it may give me the opportunity to go on an exchange visit to Japan.	IS3 (.744)
IS4	One of the reasons why I am learning J is that I feel it may be helpful to me in my future job.	IS4 (.642)
		IN2 (.626)
!S5	I want to learn J because I like some of the things in J popular culture (e.g. pop music, videos, fashion, etc.)	IS2 (.543)
		IN4 (.503)
<b>IN</b>	<b>Integrative Orientation</b>	
IN1	I like learning about other cultures and languages.	<b>IN/PA/SC</b>
IN2	Being able to speak another language is 'cool'.	IN5 (.722)
IN3	The different immigrant cultures are an important part of NZ society.	IN1 (.683)
		PA5 (.637)
IN4	I enjoy studying J.	IN3 (.529)
IN5	I want to learn J so that one day I can visit Japan and communicate with the people there.	SC5 (.418)
<b>SC</b>	<b>Linguistic self-confidence</b>	<b>SC/SA</b>
SC1	I get discouraged because I can't speak J very well.	SC3 (.759)
SC2	It's OK to make mistakes when you're learning how to speak and write J.	SC1 (.715)
		SA5 (.643)
SC3	I feel relaxed when the teacher asks me to speak J in class.	SC4 (.486)

SC4	I really like classroom activities that involve a Lot of speaking with other students and the teacher.	<b>PA</b>
SC5	If I learn new J words or sentences I like to try to use them straight away (either in class or with J people).	PA2 (.766) PA1 (.750)
<b>PA</b>	<b>Parental Attitude</b>	PA4 (.649)
PA1	My parents stress that studying another language will have important benefits for me later on, when I finish school.	<b>SA</b> SA1 (.730)
PA2	My parents encouraged me to learn another language.	SA2 (.686)
PA3	My parents try to help me with my learning of J.	SA4 (.513)
PA4	My parents think it is very important for me to learn J.	
PA5	My parents are interested in other cultures.	
<b>SA</b>	<b>School Administrative Environment</b>	
SA1	I've been advised by some teachers at school to take another subject next year instead of J.	
SA2	I don't think I'll do J next year because it clashes with another subject I want to do.	
SA3	I feel that our school treats J as an important subject.	
SA4	I'm often tired in J classes because they are held at bad times of the day.	
SA5	It's harder to get good marks in J than it is in other subjects.	
<b>TT</b>	<b>The Teacher</b>	
TT1	My J teacher is very fluent in J.	
TT2	This year I am learning a lot of J from my teacher.	
TT3	My J teacher uses a lot of different ways to help us learn J.	
TT4	My J teacher gives us very clear explanations when teaching us.	
TT5	I like my J teacher.	