

8 Culture, Autonomy and the Self in Language Learning

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*You can't walk alone. Many have given the illusion,
but none have really walked alone. Man is not
made that way. Each man is bedded in his people,
their history, their culture, and their values.*
Peter Abrahams, 1953, *Return to Goli*

Introduction

In recent years much second language acquisition (SLA) research on motivation has centred on the learning and use of English around the world. This focus has heightened researchers' and teachers' awareness of important language issues concerning globalisation, colonisation and immigration, and has contributed to the development of new conceptual frameworks in which the self and identity figure prominently (e.g. Block, 2007; Dörnyei, 2005; Norton, 2000). Although this research has been carried out internationally, there has been little discussion and less empirical examination of the role of culture in motivational processes. This lacuna is important to address, since many motivational models that are widely used were developed in Western countries, and their applicability across cultures is not certain.

This chapter explores this issue with particular attention to autonomy as it is defined by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002). We begin with a definition of culture and its relation with communication. We then examine the link between autonomy and the self, particularly as it is described in Self-Determination Theory. We consider three ways in which autonomy has been construed to vary across cultures, and we argue that each of these approaches emphasises that autonomy's importance for motivated learning operates in concert with other fundamental needs, particularly a sense of competence and relatedness with significant others in the learners' social world.

Culture and Communication

There are numerous definitions of culture, each stressing different aspects of this complex concept (Baldwin *et al.*, 2006; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). For the present purpose, culture is defined as the systems of meaning (i.e. representations, beliefs, rituals, and other symbols and symbolic practices) that are 'shared' in two senses: first, they are co-constructed by interlocutors, and second, they become the conventions and mores that are more or less distributed among members of a social network (cf. Chiu & Hong, 2006). Although there are many kinds of meanings that can be shared, anthropologists, psychologists and others have focused on some aspects more than others, including notions of the self, values and cognitive styles (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2004).

Culture, then, is the intersubjective or normative 'web of belief' distributed among members of a social group. This definition does not suggest that all individuals within a given group (national or otherwise) share homogeneous meaning systems with impermeable boundaries between them. Some knowledge and/or practices may be more or less widely understood, endorsed, embodied and enacted among members of a social network, and this diversity is amplified by the fact that different subsystems (e.g. family, religion and education) intersect in different ways for each person in each social interaction. Moreover, a person may belong to multiple social networks with different meaning systems (e.g. multiple ethnocultural groups).

Furthermore, this conception does not suggest that cultural meaning systems are static and unchangeable. Psychologically, cultural understandings and practices can be construed as mental habits that are the default manner in which thought, emotion and action are framed (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, these normative, habitual frames of reference are not fixed, but rather are mindsets that can become salient in different situations (cf. Oyserman, 2011). Because each interaction involves the construction of common ground between individuals who each bring different assumptions, goals and interpretations to each interaction, culture is contextually and temporally dynamic. Although culture and psyche are mutually constituted (cf. Markus & Kitayama, 2010), shared cultural systems do not determine any individual person's thoughts, emotions or actions; neither do interlocutors have free will to construct completely idiosyncratic meanings with each new encounter. Propensities can be questioned or challenged, and accepted, resisted or stylised to suit, as human needs warrant.

Culture is intricately tied to communication. We define communication similarly to Carey (1992), such that it refers not simply to the

transmission of information between sender and receiver (cf. Shannon & Weaver, 1949), but more fully as the symbolic practices whereby culture is created and maintained, transmitted and transformed. As stated above, culture derives from patterns of interactions between members of a group, and these patterns establish a common system of coding and decoding information about the world specific to those people. To the extent that these communicative interactions are repeated, a culture develops which is the 'sum of the consensuses of the individual communication patterns manifest by the way of life' (Kim, 1988: 46; see also Kim, 2008). Although meaning is also constructed through the communicative moves of paralinguistic and non-linguistic acts, language has a special status as a communicative and cognitive tool that is particularly well adapted to orienting interlocutors' attention to aspects of their shared physical and psychological worlds (cf. Tomasello, 2011). An implication of this assumption is that when new communication practices are adopted and a new communication system is acquired, as happens when one learns a new language, one potentially has access to a new meaning system (Kim, 1988, 2008; Kramersch, 2013).

Autonomy, Self-Determination and Motivation across Cultures

Within language learning research, autonomy has many definitions and its study has been informed by technical, social psychological, socio-cultural and critical approaches (Benson, 1997; Oxford, 2003). Benson (2011: 58) offers a broad definition of autonomy, as 'the capacity to take control of one's own learning'. One theory in which autonomy plays a central role is Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002). This theory narrows the definition to 'being the perceived origin or source of one's own behavior, ... [and] acting from interest and integrated values' (Ryan & Deci, 2002: 8). Although it is argued to be the key to motivated engagement, autonomy works in concert with two other fundamental needs: competence, which refers to 'feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities' (Ryan & Deci, 2002: 7), and relatedness, which involves 'feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others and to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one's community' (Ryan & Deci, 2002: 7). To the extent that these needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled, language learners could be expected to experience greater enjoyment and stimulation in learning and using the target language (TL), and would be likely to report that they are learning the language because they see it as personally important and

possibly central to their sense of self (termed 'intrinsic motivation', 'identified regulation' and 'integrated regulation', respectively), rather than that they are learning the language because they feel situational circumstances or other persons are deciding and directing their involvement in language learning (termed 'external regulation' and 'introjected regulation', respectively). Greater self-determination is associated with better psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000), as well as a host of educationally relevant attitudes and behaviours, including more positive attitudes towards the learning situation, more engagement and persistence in learning, increased creativity and stronger academic success (see Noels, 2009, for a review of research on language learning).

The centrality of autonomy as a motivational construct seems appropriate when discussing motivation in Western societies, where individualism is a strongly held cultural value. However, it might be argued to be less important for motivation in other societies, notably Asian societies. According to cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995), people from Western societies tend to hold relatively individualistic values, which emphasise the importance of self-determination and achieving personal goals, along with independent self-construals, which involve a sense of oneself as autonomous and separate from the social context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In other cultures, particularly in East Asian nations, people purportedly emphasise more collectivistic values, which prioritise the harmony and structure of interpersonal and group relationships, along with interdependent self-construals, in which one's sense of self is construed as connected with others and the broader context. In a related vein, researchers have claimed that Western and East Asian cultures have different cognitive styles, such that Western cultures are more analytic and East Asian cultures are more holistic (Nisbett, 2004). These cognitive styles are linked to different educational ideologies. According to Tweed and Lehmann (2002; see also Kühnen *et al.*, 2012), the Western Socratic educational tradition emphasises the questioning of knowledge (including one's own); the value of self-generated knowledge and the search for true knowledge, not just true belief. The East Asian Confucian educational tradition emphasises respect for teachers, effort and high fidelity in the mastery of course materials. Rather than being solely a search for truth, learning is linked to the moral and social development of a more virtuous person by dedicating oneself to the process of learning.

Consistent with these observed broad tendencies, several researchers have argued that the social and psychological dynamics of language learning and teaching in East Asian societies may be quite different from North America. Some argue that traditional East Asian pedagogical approaches that include teacher-focused instructional styles, form-focused content and exacting assessment criteria are detrimental to students' sense of competence and autonomy (e.g. Yang, 1998). Others argue that

stressing autonomy in language education may be inappropriate in Asian contexts where social interconnectedness and respect for authority are emphasised (Farmer, 1994; Ho & Crookall, 1995; Jones, 1995; Riley, 1988). Still others suggest that autonomy may take different forms depending upon the cultural context (Littlewood, 1999).

Proactive and Reactive Autonomy: An Empirical Investigation

Several frameworks attempt to articulate how autonomy might differ qualitatively across cultures. Littlewood (1999) distinguishes between proactive and reactive autonomy. Proactive autonomy refers to an experience of autonomy in which the learner sets the direction of learning, regulates the activity and self-evaluates his/her progress independently of the teacher. The focus is on volition, choice and actions that affirm one's individuality and separateness from the group. In contrast, reactive autonomy refers to a form of autonomy in which the learner regulates their own learning once direction has been set by the teacher. Once this direction is articulated, learners are able to autonomously organise their resources to achieve the goals they choose from among those suggested by the teacher. Littlewood argues that language learners in Western contexts prefer teaching approaches that promote proactive autonomy, but East Asians prefer an approach that fosters reactive autonomy. He links these broad preferences to differences in self-construals, the value accorded to power differentials and ideologies regarding education, such that greater interdependence, greater regard for authority and Confucian (vs. Socratic) approaches to education would predict greater preference for reactive autonomy, and the converse would predict proactive autonomy.

As a first step in examining whether there are ethnocultural group differences in preferences for these two forms of autonomy, we asked Euro-Canadian and Asian-Canadian students registered in university language classes to complete a questionnaire. Large-scale surveys point to the particularly strong value that Chinese immigrant families in North America place on education compared to non-Asian families (e.g. PEW Research Centre, 2013). These patterns complement findings from cross-cultural comparisons that show that families in East Asia conceptualise education differently than those in North America (e.g. Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Fryberg & Markus, 2007). Thus, although participants in this study were educated in Canadian schools, we hypothesised that there would still be differences between groups on some education-relevant variables.

Method

The 63 Euro-Canadian students were registered primarily in European-language courses (85.4%; 7.9% in Asian-language courses); the 60 Asian-Canadian students were registered primarily in Asian-language courses (70%; 20% European-language/English classes). Chi-square tests showed that there were no differences between the groups in the distribution across gender (31.4% male), heritage language status (23.7% heritage language learners), nor the level of the language class (beginner: 77.1%; advanced: 17.9%). The results of *t*-tests indicated that the groups were of the same age ($M = 19.16$ years, $SD = 1.82$), had studied the language for an equal duration ($M = 24.61$ months) and expressed the same degree of TL competence in reading, writing, speaking and understanding ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.17$). Thus, the groups were similar on a number of dimensions other than ethnic background that might affect their feelings of self, autonomy and motivation.

The participants completed a questionnaire that assessed the aspects of cultural belief systems that Littlewood (1999) suggested predict differences in preferences for proactive and reactive autonomy. Drawing from Tweed (2000), various measures indexed students' endorsement of a Socratic learning approach, including public and private questioning, generating ideas, as well as a learning style that emphasises judging and evaluating things and ideas (i.e. Sternberg & Wagner's (1992) judicial thinking style). Another set of indices assessed aspects of a Confucian learning approach, including a preference for structured problems and 'getting things done' (i.e. Sternberg & Wagner's (1992) executive thinking style) and a pragmatic desire for structured knowledge (adapted from Wilkinson & Migotsky's (1994) naïve realism scale; see Table 8.1 for a summary of these indices). As well, the questionnaire indexed students' independent and interdependent self-construals (Leung & Kim, 1997), and beliefs regarding instructor authority (adapted from Earley & Erez, 1997). Lastly, we assessed motivational intensity (Gardner, 2010) and students' endorsement of external, introjected and identified regulation and intrinsic motivation, and weighted the scores for each type of regulation from -2 to $+2$, such that the summed score provided an index of how self-determined the students' motivational orientations were, such that negative scores indicated more controlled and positive scores indicated more autonomous motivational orientations (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

As well, we developed a nine-item instrument to assess proactive autonomy (e.g. 'In my second language class, I prefer setting my own goals for what I hope to accomplish') and reactive autonomy (e.g. 'In my second language class, I prefer to choose my goals for what I hope to accomplish from those that my teacher identifies as important') based on Holec's (1981) discussion of autonomy in setting learning objectives;

Table 8.1 Examples of instrument items and Cronbach alpha indices of internal consistency

| <i>Instrument</i> | <i>Number of items</i> | <i>Cronbach Alpha</i> | <i>Item example</i> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Independent self-construal | 15 | .85 | My personal identity independent of others is very important to me |
| Interdependent self-construal | 14 | .85 | My relationships with others in my group are more important than my personal accomplishments |
| Acceptance of teacher authority | 8 | .71 | In education-related matters, instructors have a right to expect obedience from their students |
| Desire to evaluate and compare ideas | 8 | .78 | I like projects where I can study and rate different points of view or conflicting ideas |
| Generating ideas | 5 | .80 | I try to invent my own theories relating to topics we study |
| Public questioning | 4 | .75 | I've been known to publicly disagree with instructors |
| Private questioning | 4 | .65 | I tend to be somewhat sceptical in my thinking regarding the material taught in textbooks |
| Desire for structured knowledge | 3 | .55 | I prefer that teachers simply tell me the facts |
| Desire for structured tasks | 7 | .73 | I like to follow clear rules and directions when doing a task |
| Motivational intensity | 10 | .77 | I really work hard to learn my second language |

determining the content, format and pace of learning activities; and evaluating progress and achievement (see Appendix). We also created an index of abdicated autonomy, which indicated the extent to which the student desired the teacher to take control over the learning process (e.g. 'In my second language class, I prefer for my teacher to determine the goals that I should try to accomplish'). Students indicated which of these three possibilities they preferred and a summed score for each form of autonomy was computed.

Results

Was there any evidence that self-construals, cognitive style and beliefs about instructor authority were interrelated in a 'web of beliefs'? As hypothesised, the more students reported independent self-construals, the more they endorsed public questioning of the instructor and a preference for comparing and evaluating ideas ($r = .28$ and $r = .20$ respectively, $p < .05$). Also consistent with expectations, the more students endorsed an interdependent self-construal, the more they endorsed a desire for structured knowledge and structured tasks ($r = .23$ and $r = .20$, respectively, $p < .05$), but also a preference for private questioning, comparing and evaluating ideas, and generating ideas ($r = .23$, $r = .23$, and $r = .36$, respectively, $p < .05$). Stronger endorsement of instructor authority in the classroom was also related to the desire for structured knowledge and structured tasks ($r = .23$ and $r = .22$, respectively, $p < .05$). Thus, with some exceptions, there is general support for the idea that different types of self-construals and power values relate to distinct cognitive styles, reflecting a system of cultural beliefs regarding self-construals, power hierarchies and cognitive styles.

Did these indicators of cultural belief systems differ across ethnic groups? A 2×3 mixed model ANOVA compared the Asian and Euro-Canadian groups (i.e. the between-subjects factor) on independent and interdependent self-construals (i.e. the within-subjects factor), and showed a significant interaction effect ($F(1,120) = 18.83$, $p < .01$, $\beta^2 = .14$). The results of post-hoc Tukey tests showed that both groups endorsed independent self-construals (Asian-Canadians: $M = 5.11$, $SD = .72$; Euro-Canadians: $M = 5.68$, $SD = .71$) more than interdependent self-construals (Asian-Canadians: $M = 4.52$, $SD = .83$; Euro-Canadians: $M = 4.26$, $SD = .86$), but the difference was larger for the Euro-Canadians such that they scored significantly higher on independent self-construals than did Asian-Canadians. Thus, consistent with expectations, Euro-Canadians more strongly endorsed independent relative to interdependent self-construals than did Asian-Canadians.

Further evidence of ethnic group differences came from a series of t -tests, which showed that the Asian-Canadian students scored significantly higher

Table 8.2 Means, standard deviations and *t*-values for cognitive and motivational values as a function of ethnic group

| Variables | Groups | | | | <i>t</i> -value |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|
| | Asian-Canadians | | Euro-Canadians | | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | |
| Generating ideas | 3.93 | 1.06 | 3.96 | 1.21 | 0.14 |
| Desire to evaluate and compare ideas | 4.13 | 0.77 | 4.22 | 0.84 | 0.59 |
| Public questioning | 3.12 | 1.21 | 3.29 | 1.29 | 0.78 |
| Private questioning | 3.63 | 1.06 | 3.47 | 1.12 | 0.80 |
| Desire for structured knowledge | 5.32 | 0.78 | 5.06 | 0.84 | 1.79 [†] |
| Desire for structured tasks | 4.49 | 1.10 | 4.00 | 1.10 | 2.59* |
| Acceptance of teacher authority | 2.96 | 0.91 | 2.89 | 0.72 | 0.50 |
| Self-determination index | 0.42 | 3.60 | 2.23 | 4.02 | 2.61* |
| Motivational intensity | 4.92 | 0.82 | 5.19 | 0.90 | 1.74 [†] |
| Proactive autonomy | 2.13 | 2.11 | 2.24 | 1.77 | 0.30 |
| Reactive autonomy | 4.42 | 2.06 | 4.92 | 1.73 | 1.47 |
| Abdicated autonomy | 2.45 | 2.00 | 1.84 | 1.64 | 1.85 [†] |

Notes: * $p < .05$; [†] $p < .08$.

on the two indicators of Confucianist cognitive style including a preference for structured tasks and (marginally) structured knowledge than did the Euro-Canadian students (see Table 8.2). The Asian-Canadian students also scored lower on self-determination and marginally lower on motivational intensity than did their Euro-Canadian counterparts. There was no difference between groups on the Socratic indices, nor on their acceptance of teacher authority. Perhaps because both groups were enrolled in the Canadian secondary and post-secondary school system, they were similar in their endorsement of these Western educational norms and practices. The groups differed, therefore, only in terms of self-construals and the beliefs indexing Confucian learning approaches.

Our third question was whether there was a difference in the patterns of endorsement of the three autonomy categories as a function of participants' ethnocultural background. Based on Littlewood's (1999) discussion,

Table 8.3 Distribution of participants and adjusted standardised residuals as a function of autonomy item and ethnocultural group

| Item number | Autonomy form | Ethnocultural group | | | | Chi-squared (with 2 df) |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------|---------------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| | | Asian-Canadian (N = 60) | | Euro-Canadian (N = 63) | | |
| | | % | Adj. SR | % | Adj. SR | |
| 1. | Proactive | 43.3 | 0.4 | 39.7 | -0.4 | |
| | Reactive | 36.7 | -1.4 | 49.2 | 1.4 | 2.79 |
| | Abdicated | 20.0 | 1.4 | 11.1 | -1.4 | |
| 2. | Proactive | 43.3 | 1.0 | 34.9 | -1.0 | |
| | Reactive | 31.7 | -1.8 | 47.6 | 1.8 | 3.35 |
| | Abdicated | 25 | 1.0 | 17.5 | -1.0 | |
| 3. | Proactive | 25.0 | 0.0 | 25.4 | 0.1 | |
| | Reactive | 61.7 | -0.6 | 66.7 | 0.6 | 0.97 |
| | Abdicated | 13.3 | 1.0 | 7.9 | -1.0 | |
| 4. | Proactive | 15.0 | 1.2 | 7.9 | -1.2 | |
| | Reactive | 31.7 | -0.7 | 38.1 | 0.7 | 1.71 |
| | Abdicated | 53.3 | 0.0 | 54.0 | 0.1 | |
| 5. | Proactive | 10.0 | -2.4 | 27.0 | 2.4 | |
| | Reactive | 26.7 | 0.0 | 27.0 | 0.0 | 6.43* |
| | Abdicated | 63.3 | 1.9 | 46.0 | -1.9 | |
| 6. | Proactive | 13.3 | -1.3 | 22.2 | 1.3 | |
| | Reactive | 53.3 | -0.8 | 60.3 | 0.8 | 4.69 |
| | Abdicated | 33.3 | 2.0 | 17.5 | -2.0 | |

(continued)

Table 8.3 Distribution of participants and adjusted standardised residuals as a function of autonomy item and ethnocultural group (*continued*)

| Item number | Autonomy form | Ethnocultural group | | | | Chi-squared (with 2 df) |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------|---------------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| | | Asian-Canadian (N = 60) | | Euro-Canadian (N = 63) | | |
| | | % | Adj. SR | % | Adj. SR | |
| 7. | Proactive | 20.0 | 0.1 | 19.0 | -0.1 | |
| | Reactive | 65.0 | -1.0 | 73.0 | 1.0 | 1.65 |
| | Abdicated | 15.0 | 1.2 | 7.9 | -1.2 | |
| 8. | Proactive | 30.0 | 0.0 | 30.2 | 0.0 | |
| | Reactive | 58.3 | 0.0 | 58.7 | 0.0 | 0.01 |
| | Abdicated | 11.7 | 0.1 | 11.1 | 0.0 | |
| 9. | Proactive | 13.3 | -0.6 | 17.5 | 0.6 | |
| | Reactive | 76.7 | 0.7 | 71.4 | -0.7 | 0.49 |
| | Abdicated | 10.0 | -0.2 | 11.1 | 0.2 | |

Notes: * $p < .05$; Adj. SR = adjusted standardised residual; df = degree of freedom.

we hypothesised that there would be a difference between Euro- and Asian-Canadians in their endorsement of proactive and reactive autonomy, such that Euro-Canadians would more strongly endorse proactive autonomy than Asian-Canadians, and conversely Asian-Canadians would endorse reactive autonomy more than Euro-Canadians. The results of chi-squared analyses, however, showed that there were no differences in the distribution of student responses across cultural groups. As seen in Table 8.3 (see Appendix for items), both groups of students preferred to set goals by themselves or with the instructor's help (items 1–3); they preferred to choose content with the help of the teacher or have the teacher do it (items 4–6) and they preferred to work with the teacher to monitor their pace and assess their achievement (items 7–9). One exception concerned decisions about assignment topics, such that fewer Asian-Canadian students chose the proactive autonomy response and more

Euro-Canadian students chose the proactive autonomy item than would be expected by chance ($\chi^2(2) = 6.43, p = .04$; see item 5 in Table 8.3).

A second analysis approached this question from another angle. Summed scores for each autonomy score were computed and these were compared across the two groups using a 2×3 mixed model ANOVA, with group (Asian- vs. Euro-Canadian) as the between-subjects factor and autonomy form (proactive vs. reactive vs. abdicated autonomy) as the within-subjects factor. The results yielded neither an interaction effect between the group and the form of autonomy nor a main effect for the group; however, a main effect for autonomy form showed that both Euro- and Asian-Canadians preferred reactive autonomy to proactive and abdicated autonomy ($F(2,242) = 47.91, p < .001$; see Table 8.2). Moreover, reactive autonomy was marginally correlated with greater self-determination and more motivational intensity ($r = .15, p = .09$ and $r = .15, p = .09$, respectively) and abdicated autonomy was linked marginally to less motivational intensity ($r = -.16, p = .09$). Proactive autonomy was unrelated to either motivational index, indicating that reactive autonomy was the more motivating form of autonomy.

Discussion

We can draw two general conclusions from these findings. Consistent with the claims of Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Tweed and Lehman (2002), we can see that beliefs about the self and ideologies of education (to a lesser extent) differentiate ethnocultural groups, but inconsistent with the claims of Littlewood (1999) there is little evidence that the groups differ in their preferred forms of autonomy in the language classroom. There are certainly limitations to this small study, notably that both groups originate from Canada and have experience with the Canadian educational system, and so it is not surprising that there are relatively few differences between groups, particularly with regard to their teacher authority and Socratic beliefs. That said, it would seem that these Asian-Canadian students nonetheless hold beliefs about education based to some extent on Chinese cultural traditions, perhaps instilled by their parents. More substantial group differences due to differences in educational ideologies would likely be evident in comparisons of students in China and other parts of the world, where there is likely to be less influence from other cultural traditions.

Perhaps the more interesting, if somewhat counter-intuitive, finding was that both groups, regardless of their cultural background, preferred reactive to proactive autonomy. This contrasted with the expectation that North American students would prefer proactive autonomy, that is, the opportunity to set the goals, pace and evaluation in as independent a manner as possible. Instead, students from both backgrounds generally

preferred to work collaboratively with their teacher across most aspects of the learning process. As reactive autonomy is framed in this study, the teacher is the 'expert' in the area, and so can offer constructive guidance, but the learner must follow through with the hard work of learning the material and acquiring the skills. Reactive autonomy would seem to have some motivational force, as evidenced by its positive (although weak) correlations with greater self-determined orientation and motivational intensity.

This finding that students prefer the guidance of the teacher in helping them to make decisions in their learning instead of complete independence is consistent with the observation that autonomy is not equivalent to independence (Chirkov *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, it is also consistent with the observation that autonomy support does not only imply providing choices to students so that they can act according to their own wishes, but also providing informative instruction and feedback on their learning progress and establishing a secure, involved connection between teacher and student (Reeve *et al.*, 2004). Stated otherwise, autonomy support does not function in isolation, but in concert with competence and relatedness-support.

Personal and Relational Autonomy

The importance of interconnectedness with others is highlighted in other frameworks that claim there are differences in the forms of autonomy across culture. For example, Yeh and Yang (2006; see also Yeh *et al.*, 2007) maintain that individuating autonomy refers to an intrapersonal domain of individuation and volitional agency, and relating autonomy refers to an interpersonal domain of interdependence and volitional agency in accordance with the surrounding context and others participating in the interaction. Similarly, Rudy *et al.* (2007) differentiate between individual and inclusive autonomy, and report results showing that a sense of individual autonomous motivation is predictive of the well-being of European Canadians, but a sense of inclusive autonomous motivation (particularly relating to family members) is also predictive of well-being for Chinese Singaporeans. Gore and Cross (2006) have framed this distinction as one reflecting reasons for pursuing a task that relates to one's personal goals and reasons for pursuing a task that take into account close relationships. Both personal and relational reasons can be more or less autonomous, depending on the extent to which they are consistent with the person's choices and values. Gore and Cross found that both personal reasons and relational reasons that were autonomous predicted American students' effort and progress in achieving a variety of goals. They further maintain that people with stronger interdependent

self-construals endorse more relationally autonomous reasons for their goals.

These perspectives emphasise that close relationships and social obligations are not necessarily opposed to individual preferences and wishes, particularly in collectivistic societies (Miller *et al.*, 2011). SDT claims that 'autonomy' refers to 'a sense of endorsement and initiation with regards to one's own behavior' (Deci & Ryan, 1991: 272). This definition does not imply that people must choose individualistic courses of action that are distinct from or run contrary to the expectations of others. Rather, persons may feel autonomous while meeting social expectations if they have internalised and identify with those expectations. Thus, it would be expected that in societies where interdependent self-construals are fostered, expectations from family and friends would be associated with better well-being. This hypothesis has been supported in comparisons of American and Indian participants (Gore & Cross, 2006; Miller *et al.*, 2011). In the context of language learning, then, it might be expected that relationally autonomous reasons (e.g. 'I am learning English because it is important to someone close to me') might be at least as important as personally autonomous reasons (e.g. 'I am learning English because I really believe it is an important goal to have') for predicting engagement and satisfaction in the language classroom, whereas controlled reasons of both kinds would undermine these behaviours and feelings (e.g. 'I am learning this language because I would feel guilty, ashamed or anxious if I did not' or 'I am learning English because I would let someone else down if I did not').

When considered in connection with the findings regarding reactive autonomy, these frameworks raise questions about how we should consider autonomy across cultural contexts. Is it of greater theoretical and applied value to frame cultural variations in terms of qualitatively different forms of autonomy, as these models do? Or should we assume that the two dimensions of autonomy and relatedness play greater or lesser roles depending upon the cultural group (cf. Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Bao & Lam, 2008; Hui *et al.*, 2011)? The answer to this question could have important implications for how we understand culture, autonomy and the self, and also how we develop and deliver language courses in different cultural and educational contexts.

Primary and Secondary Control

The preceding discussion of forms of autonomy has the overarching premise that cultural groups differ in the emphasis placed on defining autonomy in terms of one's unique interests and in terms of one's interests that are consistent with important others in their social and

educational ecologies, largely because differences in self-construals have different implications for how distinct the self is from construals of significant others. This perspective allows us to reconcile the universality of autonomy as fundamental to human motivation, as long as we simultaneously recognise the importance of relatedness. Another approach to understanding how culture is tied to the relation between autonomy and the self is to consider how people react to situations where their autonomy is constrained. According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002), controlling forces in the environment that limit an individual's freedom of choice should hamper one's sense of autonomy and thereby decrease intrinsic motivation. Cross-cultural research indicates that North Americans are particularly sensitive to perceived constraints compared to members of other cultural groups. Factors like having a choice made for them by others, feelings of social obligation and even having to make a choice in front of a picture of eyes have been shown to decrease North Americans' sense of autonomy and reduce the motivational benefits they gain from having choices; for members of other cultures these conditions have a neutral or even a positive effect (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Miller *et al.*, 2011; Na & Kitayama, 2011).

To understand how some people manage to maintain a sense of autonomy and well-being even in controlled environments, we consider a distinction that has been drawn between primary and secondary control strategies (Rothbaum *et al.*, 1982). Through primary control, individuals achieve a sense of control through actions that influence the environment or the other people around them. Secondary control has been defined as a more internally targeted, accommodative strategy through which individuals adjust some aspect of themselves to better fit the environment. This can include adjusting their perspective on a situation to accept things as they are, termed 'positive reappraisals' (Morling & Evered, 2006: 282). To illustrate these strategies, consider the example of a student who is enrolled in a language class with an instructor who uses a teacher-centred, authoritarian style, including choosing the topics that will be discussed during conversation sessions. This student could engage in a primary control strategy by visiting the instructor's office hours to argue for more opportunities to do projects that reflect individual class members' interests, or she/he could use a secondary control strategy by deciding to look at this situation as an opportunity to learn new things that perhaps she/he might not have considered otherwise. Depending on the situation, either of these reactions could be adaptive, and she might even pursue both types of control at the same time.

The results of a study of 100 university students registered in various language classes show that students in authoritarian situations can effectively deal with pressure and control by adapting their own approach to

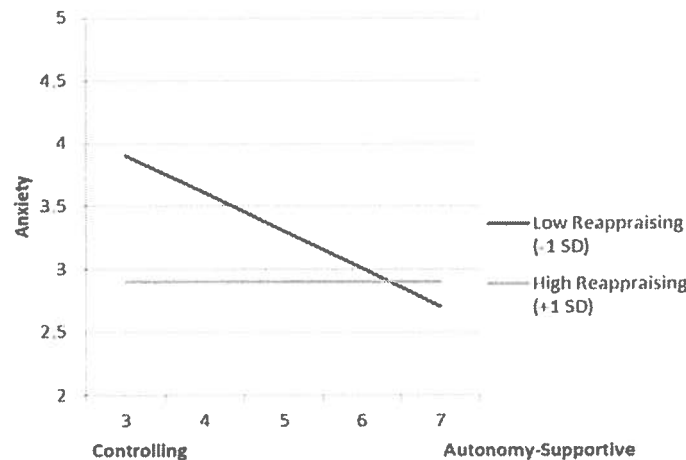


Figure 8.1 Interaction of secondary control and instructor's style on anxiety

the learning situation (Chaffee, Noels & Sugita McEown, under review). This study looked mainly at secondary control in terms of positive reappraisals (e.g. 'I find I usually learn something meaningful from a difficult situation in my [TL] studies'; four Likert-type items; Cronbach alpha = .62) (some items adapted from Wrosch, Heckhausen & Lachman, 2000). It also assessed students' use of primary control strategies (e.g. 'When faced with a bad situation in my [TL] class, I do what I can to change it for the better'; five Likert-type items; Cronbach alpha = .79), and whether participants perceived their TL instructor to be relatively autonomy-supportive or controlling using 23 Likert-type items based on the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ; Williams *et al.*, 1994) and Assor *et al.* (2002; e.g. 'I feel that my [TL] instructor provides me with choices and options'; 'My [TL] instructor tells me what to do all the time.'; Cronbach alpha = .90). Finally, we also measured students' motivational orientation along the SDT continuum (i.e. amotivation, external, introjected, identified and integrated regulation, and intrinsic motivation; adapted from mean Cronbach alpha = .81), anxiety using the TL in the classroom (adapted from Gardner, 1985); 10 Likert-type items, Cronbach alpha = .86), academic engagement (Salmela-Aro & Upadaya, 2012; three-item subscales measured energy; 'I am enthusiastic about my [TL] studies', absorption; 'Time flies when I am studying [the TL]', and dedication; 'I find my [TL] coursework full of meaning and purpose'; mean Cronbach alpha = .76) and self-evaluations of language competence.

The results of regression analyses showed that both primary control and secondary control were associated with high levels of academic engagement and self-determined motivational orientations, and low levels of amotivation and anxiety. Unlike primary control, however, secondary control also moderated the effect of a controlling instructor on many of these outcomes. As shown in Figure 8.1, for students low in secondary control, anxiety was high when the instructor was controlling but moderate when the instructor was autonomy-supportive. However, students high in secondary control experienced only moderate levels of anxiety regardless of the instructor's style. Students high in secondary control also had high intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation when the teacher was controlling compared to students who did not use the internally targeted, secondary control strategy. It appears that a student's capacity to reappraise the learning situation positively does protect them against the negative, demotivating effects of a controlling teacher.

Secondary control, then, has an important effect on a range of affective and motivational factors that are important for language learning. It has been argued that secondary control may be an adaptive strategy in some collectivistic societies, including East Asian contexts, where social harmony and authority are valued (Ashman *et al.*, 2006; Morling, 2000; Morling *et al.*, 2002; Weisz *et al.*, 1984). Morling and her colleagues (2002) found that situations that evoked stronger feelings of relatedness were linked to secondary control for Japanese, but less so for Americans, which suggests that East Asians maintain motivation especially well when using this form of control. Moreover, Rothbaum and his colleagues (1982) argue that there may be other ways to assert secondary control, including illusory secondary control, predictive secondary control and vicarious secondary control. Although Chaffee, Noels and Sugita McEown (under review) found that vicarious and predictive secondary control were not particularly helpful to Canadian students, these other aspects of secondary control may be associated with positive outcomes outside North America if these strategies are encouraged and positively viewed. For instance, North American students are often encouraged to 'aim high', so it is easy to see why exerting control by lowering one's aspirations (i.e. predictive secondary control) might not be an effective motivational strategy. However, if revising one's goals or expectations is viewed as realistic rather than unambitious, this control strategy might be adaptive. Similarly, in East Asia, where interdependence and collectivism are emphasised, vicarious secondary control (i.e. through associating with others) may be more effective than it would be in Canada. We are currently conducting a study to examine these possible cultural differences in Canada and Japan (see Chaffee, Noels, Sugita McEown, Mizumoto & Takeuchi, in preparation).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the relation between autonomy and the self, and considered how culture might be implicated in this relation. We feel that a valuable perspective is one which incorporates Deci and Ryan's (2000) claim that autonomy works in concert with other fundamental needs to sustain motivated action and bring about well-being and other positive outcomes in the learning environment. Regardless of the cultural context, the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence are intertwined, and it remains for researchers to sort out how these needs are fulfilled in different contexts. The research reported here suggests that promising avenues include examinations of different conceptualisations of autonomy as more personally and relationally oriented, as well as potential moderating factors such as secondary control.

We think it is important for future research in this area to take a dialectical perspective, such that the person and the social ecology are viewed as an interactive phenomenon. Consistent with sociocultural scholars (e.g. Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2004), agency and autonomy are not simply characteristics of a person, but rather a relational phenomenon that is subject to the constraints and affordances of one's sociocultural and physical worlds. We maintain that the shared ideologies related to notions of the self, power relations, cognitive styles and many other cultural beliefs interact with motivational processes within and outside the classroom.

We have shown that there are empirical grounds for construing culture as a web of meaning, including relations between the ways in which the self is construed, acceptance of power relations and ideologies regarding education, and such a web might meaningfully differentiate groups with different ethnic backgrounds. This set of beliefs is only one aspect of our definition of culture, and a more complete analysis of the relation between culture, the self and language learning must focus on communicative practices as they relate to culture. We need to examine the intersubjective construction and distribution of beliefs and practices throughout a given group, as well as the manner through which these shared beliefs are internalised, stylised and resisted. For instance, work in conversation analyses demonstrates how beliefs are constructed and shared (cf. Kramsch, 2011), and we need to further investigate how teachers, classmates, family members, members of the TL community and others communicate with learners in a manner that facilitates or undermines the internalisation of the language (and relevant sociocommunicative representations and practices), and the emergence of a sense of self that incorporates a sense of ownership of that language. We also need to better understand how sociocultural meanings become

distributed throughout a classroom, a school, a community and even broader social networks and communities, such that they become the normative, intersubjective 'reality' that forms the common ground for that group's members. Given the current international interest in language learning, as a field we are well poised to contribute substantially to understanding these and other issues concerning culture, autonomy and the self.

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Appendix

Items to assess proactive, reactive and abdicated autonomy

Note: In each set of items, the first option indexes proactive autonomy, the second indexes reactive autonomy and the third indexes abdicated autonomy.

- (1) In my second language class, I prefer:
 - (a) setting my own goals for what I hope to accomplish
 - (b) to choose my goals for what I hope to accomplish from those that my teacher identifies as important.
 - (c) for my teacher to determine the goals that I should try to accomplish.
- (2) In my second language class, I prefer
 - (a) to have specific goals in mind for what I want to learn.
 - (b) to develop my goals for what I want to learn with my teachers.
 - (c) for my teacher to provide me with goals.
- (3) In my second language class, I prefer
 - (a) to not rely on anyone to provide me with goals for what I want to accomplish in my second language class.
 - (b) to create my own goals once my teacher has provided examples of several goals for the class.
 - (c) for my teacher to identify goals for what I want to accomplish.
- (4) In my second language class, I prefer
 - (a) to be able to choose the order in which I learn new concepts.
 - (b) to work with my language teacher to select the order in which new concepts are presented.
 - (c) for my language teacher to choose the order in which new concepts are presented.
- (5) In my second language class, I prefer
 - (a) to create an assignment that I can tailor to my own interests.
 - (b) to work with my teacher in deciding the topics of assignments.
 - (c) to complete an assignment created by my teacher.
- (6) In my second language class, I prefer
 - (a) assignments where I decide the form and topic by myself (e.g. a poster of a country's traditional dances).

- (b) having options to choose from when deciding the form and topic of an assignment (e.g. a poster of a country's traditional dances or a video presentation of the same topic).
 - (c) assignments that are clearly planned out by my teachers.
- (7) In my second language class, I prefer
- (a) to be the one to monitor my progress.
 - (b) to work with my teacher in monitoring my progress.
 - (c) for my teacher to be completely responsible for monitoring my progress.
- (8) In my second language class, I prefer
- (a) to rely on myself to determine whether or not I am keeping pace.
 - (b) to take into account both my teacher's opinion and my own in determining whether or not I am keeping pace.
 - (c) to rely on my teacher to inform me of whether or not I am keeping pace.
- (9) In my second language class, I prefer
- (a) to decide for myself if I have performed well.
 - (b) to use feedback I have received from my teacher to decide if I have performed well.
 - (c) to wait to know how well I have performed until my teacher tells me.

The Impact of Self-Concept on Language Learning

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