

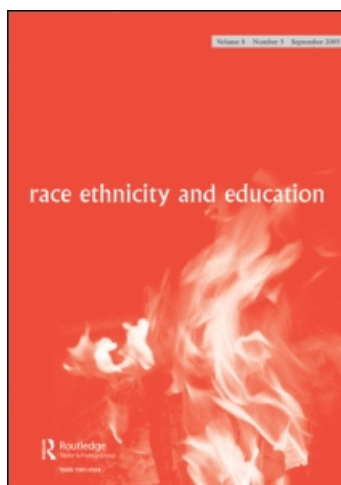
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Towards a Second-language Model of Learning in Problematic Social Contexts: the case of Arabs learning Hebrew in Israel

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ABSTRACT *This article discusses the difficulty of bilingual Arab children in Israel learning Hebrew, this being the language of conflict. It is suggested that since the Israeli-Arab social context is problematic, and does not easily permit social interaction between Israeli-Arab minority children and Israeli-Jewish majority children, the Hebrew curriculum for Arab children should be based on materials drawn from Arab culture. These materials are referred to as 'culture-based curriculum texts'. It is assumed that these texts are more interesting, comprehensible, and familiar for Israeli-Arab learners of Hebrew than those currently used, and that they will elicit more positive attitudes to Hebrew-learning situations. To illustrate this approach a second language reading model for problematic social contexts is presented based on the following concepts: schemata, interestingness, comprehensibility, instrumental and integrative motivation, meta-cognition, and emotions. The model and its practical implications are discussed.*

This article discusses the case of the bilingual Arab minority children in Israel learning Hebrew as their second language (L2) in light of the problematic Israeli-Arab social context. Further, it focuses on the L2 curriculum content and its applicability to Arab learners of Hebrew in Israel. A model is suggested for L2 reading in problematic social contexts. The scientific rationale and support for the model are presented, and practical implications for L2 learning and curricula designers are discussed as well.

The Israeli-Arab Social Context

Arabs are a minority in Israel, although they constitute a large majority in the surrounding geographic region. There are 18 Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Although a peace process is currently taking place, most of these countries are in an official state of hostility with Israel. The *Intifada*, the nationalist uprising (which began in December, 1988) of the Palestinians living in the territories

that Israel has administered since the Six Day War in 1967, has further strained majority-minority relations in Israel. Israeli Arabs, who identify themselves as Palestinians, have been outspoken in their support for the *Intifada* and their identification with Palestinian aims (Rouhana, 1990). For Israeli Jews, the local Arab minority represents a group that is highly identified ethnically, culturally, and religiously with the broader hostile regional majority.

Although the Arab minority is recognised and identified as an ethnic minority in Israel, it does not enjoy a large measure of linguistic and cultural autonomy. In 1952 a bill was introduced in the Israeli Parliament to make Hebrew the single official language of Israel. This bill did not suit the Arab population in Israel and aroused more of their sensitivity and hostility towards Hebrew-language learning in Israel, aggravating negative attitudes (Abu-Rabia, 1996a, 1996b). The Israeli Arabs have maintained their language and culture, as 90% of them live in geographically separate cities and villages. Those who live in mixed cities in Israel generally reside in separate neighbourhoods (Kraus, 1988). Hofman (1988) argued that there is a real separateness that characterises Jewish-Arab relations in Israel that is ideological as well as physical. Neither side has ever produced significant numbers of proponents of integration or assimilation of the Arab minority. The policy of culture and the linguistic resources of the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture regarding the Arab minority are oriented more to Hebrew language and literature than to Arabic language and culture (Abu-Saad, 1991; Al-Haj, 1994).

As a minority, the Israeli-Arab population in Israel learns Hebrew as L2 and as the language of the dominant group. Because of the history of hostility, the Israeli social context and socio-political problems do not permit social interaction between the two ethnic groups. Israeli-Arab children learn Hebrew through studying Jewish stories. The combination of unfamiliar Jewish textual contents and the problematic social context may negatively influence the Arab students' L2 learning process (Abu-Rabia, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Abu-Rabia & Feuerverger, 1996).

There are, *de facto*, two educational systems in Israel, a Jewish and an Arab. School budgets and teaching hours are not equitably distributed between them. Most Jewish elementary schools receive 30% more of these resources than Arab schools, and in secondary schools the gap reaches 50% (Mari, 1985; Al-Haj, 1989, 1994; Abu-Saad, 1991; Abu-Rabia, 1996c). Describing the Arab educational system in Israel, Mari (1985) indicated the urgent need for construction of 5000 additional classrooms for Arab children. Conducting a survey of the Ministry of Education services for the Arab population in southern Israel, Abu-Rabia (1996c) showed that services are not given equally to Jews and Arabs. The latter receive no pedagogical supervision of teaching or pedagogical advisory services for learning/reading disabilities. Only general supervision is provided to Arab schools, but not for specific subjects such as English, Hebrew, Arabic, mathematics, reading disabilities remediation, or science. In contrast, all these services are well provided for in the Israeli-Jewish areas.

Generally speaking, Israeli educational policy encourages a 'melting pot' approach where the goal is for all citizens to become 'Israelis' regardless of their home culture and language (Nakoma, 1983; Shohamy, 1994; Abu-Rabia & Feuerverger, 1996).

Even Jews who have come to Israel from different countries are discouraged from maintaining their cultural heritage or their language. This is in keeping with the policy of 'ingathering of the exiles' and the consolidation of the Jewish people in order to eradicate the negative connotations of 'diaspora' Jewry, which ended in the Holocaust. One can understand this policy in terms of Jewish needs, but unfortunately it leaves the Israeli Arabs out of the picture altogether. Where do they fit into the overall scheme of Israeli national identity? This is an excruciatingly complex issue, which is being examined in light of the *Intifada* and the Israeli-Arab peace process.

The Hebrew Curriculum Input for Israeli-Arab Children

The Hebrew curriculum for Israeli-Arab children (Ministry of Education, 1976) consists of two units, Bible and Hebrew literature. The Bible section accounts for almost one-third of the total number of texts. The texts are from Isaiah, Genesis, Psalms, Kings, The Book of Ruth, Proverbs, Exodus, Abot, and the Aggada. The literature section consists of Jewish cultural stories and poems by famous Jewish writers: Leah Goldberg, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Rahel, and Solomon Ibn Gvirol.

Most of the curriculum, 120 pages, contains Jewish cultural contents, while only 20 Hebrew texts, each one page in length, deal with general knowledge. This Hebrew curriculum is mandatory for high school students from ninth to twelfth grade. Teachers may select only five out of the 20 general knowledge texts. Failure to pass the final matriculation exam in Hebrew hinders students' higher academic studies. Since the Israeli-Arab context is problematic, these Hebrew Jewish texts may add to the negative feelings Arab children harbour towards learning Hebrew in such a hostile Arab-Jewish social context.

Al-Haj (1994) pointed out that Arab students learn 256 hours of the Hebrew Bible and only 30 hours of Islamic/Koranic studies. Moreover, secular Jewish schools learn 640 hours of Hebrew Bible and not even one hour of Islamic/Koranic studies. Al-Haj continues that in Arab schools the Hebrew Bible is taught as a national religious subject, while in Israeli-Jewish schools the Koran is offered as a literature text and not as a Muslim holy book (Mari, 1985, p. 82). Further, Ben-Or (1991, p. 5) claims that Arab teachers are strictly instructed to illustrate national and religious parts of Arab history using school texts that present a more Israeli nationalist orientation. These instructions seem to indicate a 'melting pot' policy rather than a multicultural one, where cultural diversity is welcomed and encouraged (Cummins, 1981a, 1981b). The problem is that the policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture does not recognise the Israeli-Arab minority culturally and linguistically. This statement was actually developed by a number of Israeli-Arab and Jewish researchers (Nakhleh, 1977; Mari, 1985; Al-Haj, 1989). Neglect of the needs of the Arab minority are the seeds of resentment and hostility in Arab-Jewish relations in Israel (Al-Haj, 1994). Al-Haj recommends that the Ministry of Education must seriously consider empowering the Israeli-Arab minority by extensive revision of the Israeli-Arab curricula objectives to suit Arab-Palestinian nationality.

Namely, more Arab culture and more Arab national messages should be built into Arab school curricula.

This should be done to attenuate the feeling of deprivation that is evidently felt in the Arab sector. Revision of the Arab school curricula may foster readiness among Israeli-Arab children to learn Hebrew as their L2.

The Rationale of the Suggested Approach

The Israeli-Arab context is problematic because of the history of wars between the State of Israel and its Arab neighbours. The Arab population constitutes 17% of the population in Israel, who live as a minority group. Arabs in Israel study more Hebrew and Jewish history than Arabic language, Arab culture, and Arab history (Abu-Saad, 1991). Obviously, the tension between Jews and Arabs is reflected in the educational systems, especially in the study by the Arab minority group of Hebrew, the language of the dominant people, which symbolises the conflict of Jews and Arabs (Abu-Saad, 1991; Abu-Rabia, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Abu-Rabia & Feuerverger, 1996). It is well established in the literature that when ethnic minority groups feel threatened and deprived by the culture and language of the dominant target language (TL) group they resist learning the TL and seek to reinforce their own language and heritage (Cummins, 1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1989; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

The Arab minority in Israel are considered 'second-class citizens' even though they were born in Israel and pay taxes. Arab villages and Arab educational systems still lag behind those in the Jewish sector. The Arab municipalities regularly declare a strike in the struggle for more resources. Usually the Israeli authorities do not deny the existence of the gap, and promise to make courageous decisions to equalise the Arab sector to the Jewish one (Al-Haj, 1989; Abu-Saad, 1991). Treatment of the Arab minority in Israel as a second-class population is not surprising in light of the Declaration of Independence proclaimed with the establishment of Israel in 1948. The document clearly states that Israel is a Jewish state, and the state of all the Jews. Therefore, since the Arab citizens, accounting for 17% of the population, are not Jews they are not equal citizens. As noted, wars were part of Israeli-Arab daily life. Only recently has the peace process begun to take strides towards changing Israeli-Arab relations.

Since the social context is problematic, L2 curriculum designers need to realise that L2 learning is a social phenomenon and that social tension is likely to affect it adversely. The Arab minority student will possess negative attitudes towards L2 learning, which may be considered a serious emotional obstacle that has to be resolved before and while students are engaged in the process of second language learning (Abu-Rabia, 1995; 1996a, 1996b; Abu-Rabia & Feuerverger, 1996). Arab students need 'wise pedagogical orientations' to help them overcome emotional barriers against the Hebrew language. Such orientations would foster in these students the development of meta-cognitive learning strategies which address the Israeli-Arab reality (Abu-Rabia, 1996a, 1996b). Such strategies would enhance Arab students' concentration while engaged in a Hebrew-reading activity as well as

strengthen their belief in the value of such an activity despite their negative feelings toward the Hebrew-learning situation (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989).

Research presents evidence that the learner is more likely to respond positively and be engaged in the learning situation when the reading task is interesting (Hidi, 1990), familiar (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Lipson, 1983; Rumelhart, 1984), meaningful and comprehensible (Stanovich, 1986), and related to the learner's cultural life (Landry, 1987; Landry *et al.*, 1991), and when the learner is aware of its future benefits (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989). Thus, *interest*, *cultural familiarity*, *meaningfulness* and *comprehensibility*, and *awareness of future benefits* serve as the basis of the model suggested for the Hebrew curriculum for Arab learners in Israel.

Overview of the Literature

Interest is an important variable related to learning. Some predictions about the positive relationship between interest and reading comprehension have been made according to schema theory. Reviewing studies of interest and comprehension in reading, Asher (1980) concludes that the more interested the readers are in the material, the better they comprehend it. He also argues that the more familiar the textual material, the more interest the readers show in reading. Thus, readers' familiarity may be seen as contributing to the comprehensibility and interest of a text.

Research on interest shows that children as well as adults who are interested in a topic or activity pay more attention to it, persist at it for longer periods of time, and acquire more from it than they do with topics in which they are less interested (Estes & Vaughan, 1973; Fransson, 1977; Izard, 1977; Asher, 1979, 1980; Renninger, 1987, 1990). Even very young children have been found to have strong, stable, and relatively well-focused interests that function as powerful determinants of their attention, recognition, and memory (Renninger & Wozniak, 1985). An individual with a well-developed personal interest will have stronger reactions to certain relevant and potentially interest-evoking situations than a person without such interest.

One type of situational interest that is especially relevant to education can be created by reading materials. Interest elicited by a text through ideas, topics, and themes is a particular form of situational interest that Hidi & Baird (1988) referred to as 'text-based interest'.

These results suggest that text-based situational interest may be a good candidate for improving Arab children's Hebrew reading in Israel. Furthermore, if educators wish to use interest to improve children's writing of expository school topics, they must make sure that such knowledge is acquired by children prior to writing. Alternatively, educators may focus on individual preferences for personal topics and try to utilise these for writing. Because these types of interests usually develop together with related knowledge and values, they may prove to be good facilitators of children's written production (Graves, 1975, 1983; Hidi & McClaren, 1991).

Cultural familiarity. According to Bartlett (1932), a schema is a store of perceived

sensory information in the memory. As the number of schemata rises, one is increasingly able to recall a larger amount of information in minimum time and to perceive and remember new details; adapting the new information to an appropriate schema allows one to remember new and important ideas (Rumelhart, 1981, 1984). Consistency and adaptation to an existing schema mean understanding, and inconsistency generally means problems in the comprehension process.

Bartlett (1932) argued that schemata are culturally regulated. Schemata can impede reading comprehension and memory; details which are inconsistent with one's schema are deleted, or transformed and rationalised to fit the existing schemata in the memory. On the other hand, schemata can also play a facilitating role in cases where details are consistent with the reading content; in this case cognitive processing occurs quickly without serious obstacles (Anderson, 1987; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Numerous studies have shown that cultural background affects reading comprehension. Researchers have usually compared reading of culturally familiar and unfamiliar stories by students from different ethnic backgrounds. Results have shown that students' comprehension of cultural stories is a function of their cultural familiarity with them (Yousef, 1968; Adams & Collins, 1977; Anderson *et al.*, 1977; Steffensen *et al.*, 1979; Zagarra & Zinger, 1981; Reynolds *et al.*, 1982; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Anderson & Gipe, 1983; Lipson, 1983; Baldwin *et al.*, 1985; Gayle, 1987; Abu-Rabia, 1995, 1996a; Abu-Rabia & Feuerverger, 1996). Presenting Hebrew language texts with culturally Arab content to Arab students in Israel, therefore, would be a wise pedagogical means to attract them to Hebrew, a language that is considered the symbol of conflict (Abu-Rabia, 1996a, 1996b). It would make the texts more interesting and more comprehensible to Arab students, and so facilitate their Hebrew learning.

Awareness of Future Benefits. Gardner & Lambert (1972) were among the pioneers in the investigation of socio-psychological aspects of second language learning, conducting numerous studies on the relationship of attitudes and social context to the process. They 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 instrumental motivation. The latter is extrinsic and it stems from societal needs and environmental necessities. This notion complies with Bandura's (1986) and Zimmerman's (1989) approach 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). Many socio-educational models of L2 learning focus on the attitudes of the learners, and attitudes of the target-language group to L2 learners, as important variables affecting the L2 learning situation (Lambert, 1974; Clément, 1980; Gardner, 1985; Schumann, 1986; Spolsky, 1989; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

These authors usually suggest that the social context leads to attitudes of various kinds: negative, positive, instrumental and integrative. Spolsky (1989) suggests that these attitudes appear in the learner 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. Wong-Fillmore (1991) suggests three main factors affecting L2 learning: the need to learn the second language; speakers of the target language who provide the learners with access to the language (cultural openness); and the social setting, which brings learners and target-language speakers into contact frequently enough to make language development possible (social openness, cultural openness, interaction between learners and target-language speakers). Clément (1980) also places great emphasis on the L2 learner's motivation and the cultural milieu. Clément'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. Schumann (1986) suggested a model that focused on a cultural aspect of learning that he terms 'acculturation', under which heading, he argues, social and affective factors cluster in a single variable. Acculturation involves the integration of the social and the psychological characteristics of learners with those of target-language speakers. According to Schumann, there are two aspects of acculturation, 'social integration' and 'psychological openness', namely sufficient contact and receptiveness between members of target-language groups and L2-learner groups.

There are clearly a number of common features among the aforementioned models. They all include the effect of social context—attitudes (integrative or instrumental) and acculturation. A problematic social context usually affects L2 learning negatively, especially when the learners are minorities learning L2 as the language of the dominant group.

However, learners' awareness of the necessity of learning the L2 affects their success in learning it 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 (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989; Abu-Rabia, 1996a, 1996b).

Emotions and Cognition in Reading Comprehension

To explain the process of reading comprehension involving students' cultural background and attitudes, a differentiation should be made between two channels, one emotional and one cognitive, whereby readers cope with the texts composed of (un)familiar cultural content presented in (un)desired languages. The emotional channel deals with the student's immediate sensitive and emotional response on

visually perceiving the textual language; the cognitive channel is activated a few moments later (owing to cognitive elaboration) with respect to the cultural content of the text. The present study uses the approaches of Zajonc (1980, 1984) and Lazarus (1982). The concepts of the former are applied to the emotional aspect of the textual language and those of the latter are applied to the cognitive aspect of the textual content.

Zajonc's (1980) theory concerns the arousal of the readers' attitudes the moment they perceive the textual language. Zajonc argues that since emotional evaluation needs only minimal cognition, affective reactions do not primarily involve mediative processes. Zajonc supports his position with the argument that people usually tend to like or dislike at first glance: after people's initial reaction they search for justification of such behaviour. Cognitive processes take place after people have already made their emotional evaluation, and emotional decisions toward objects or/and situations in life. Zajonc suggests the probability of separation between the emotional system and the cognitive. Note that he (1980, 1984) admits that one's emotional channels need minimum cognitive processes, and he uses the expression 'cold cognition' to refer to the minimum cognitive processes needed to perceive a stimulus.

Conversely, Lazarus (1982) argues that cognition is a precondition for emotions. Cognitive processing is necessary, being the mediating process between humans and environment. He supports his approach by arguing that cognitive processes are crucial in mediating between people and reality. According to Lazarus, cognitive processes are also crucial in human interpretations of events and situations in the environment, and there is no situation in which we are not dependent on cognitive processing. Lazarus uses Zajonc's expression 'cold cognition' to argue that Zajonc recognises the existence of cognitive processing prior to emotions. Lazarus holds that there is an interaction between cognition and emotions, and that a connection between these two channels is necessary. The disagreement between Zajonc and Lazarus may shed light on learning in a situation of textual complexity.

Both researchers agree that minimal, 'cold' cognition takes place when people perceive the initial stimulus. This consensus is highly relevant to the interaction among motivation, attitudes, and cultural knowledge, and its impact on reading comprehension in second languages. It should be assumed that minimal cognition is required to enable readers to perceive first the language of the text, and then the cultural content of the text a few moments later.

The reader's reaction to the language of the text occurs immediately because the text is visually perceptual. As for the different Arabic and Hebrew scripts, their recognition is instantaneous for Middle Eastern people; but to recognise that the text involves familiar cultural content (e.g. Arab content in the case of Arab students) or unfamiliar cultural content (e.g. Jewish content in the case of Arab students) requires more cognitive elaboration.

The model which is presented will be capable of suggesting a theoretical approach to deal with these two aspects of the reading situation, text language and text cultural content, in problematic social contexts where minority groups resist learning L2, the language of the dominant group.

The Proposed L2 Reading Model

The proposed model is a more detailed version of the models presented earlier. This model purports to explain the L2 reading process with respect to two characteristics of the textual stimulus, the language and the content. It is assumed that Lazarus's approach can be adapted to deal with cognitive reactions for the *content* of the text, and Zajonc's approach can be adapted to explain initial emotional processes associated with the *language* of the text. The suggested model is proposed in an attempt to explain the influence of attitudes and cultural schemata on second language reading.

In addition to the themes of Zajonc and Lazarus, the proposed model includes motivation components proposed by Gardner & Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1983, 1985), namely *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation. As suggested earlier, instrumental motivation can be conceived as involving meta-cognitive processes whereby readers act to reduce emotional and cognitive hindrances to their reading process; the process is pursued for the sake of some future goal. If readers are instrumentally motivated, they may persuade themselves that engagement in the learning situation (learning the L2, reading the L2 text) will have better consequences for them. In the Israeli-Arab case, for example, instrumentally motivated readers may overcome their negative feelings toward the content or language of a culturally Jewish Hebrew text by persuading themselves that engaging in serious reading will be beneficial in the future. This is similar to the argument of Csikszentmihalyi (1978) that if the task is difficult, but the learner is aware of the challenges and rewards of the environment, this will motivate him/her to engage seriously in the learning situation. Csikszentmihalyi (1978) states:

The central requirement seems to be that the situation should provide information to the person that his or her actions are meeting a set of challenges in the environment. When this condition is present, any activity can become enjoyable and hence rewarding. (p. 210)

A similar argument is raised by Zimmerman (1989) and Bandura (1986), who maintain that the environment is an important factor affecting the motivation of learners, that natural capacity is not enough for the learner to understand learning tasks, and that the environmental rewards of learning are important as well.

According to the proposed model, when the L2 student reads a text, s/he first perceives the *language* of the text, after which the emotional processing of the language of the text occurs through the emotional channel (e.g. liking to read this language). Thus, the channels which are activated first are perceptual and emotional. They are separate from the cognitive system, although they do require some cognition (Zajonc, 1980). Emotional identification is affected by the reader's prior feelings (attitudes), which influence his/her evaluations and decisions about reading this language or refusing to do so.

According to the present model, the perception of the *content* of the text occurs later, after some words or sentences have been read, and this involves cognitive processing of the text content, which is influenced by prior knowledge and cultural

background. The cognitive processing may lead to further positive or negative reactions to reading the content and to a decision to read or reject the text according to the type of process, as detailed by Lazarus (1982). Instrumental motivation is relevant to the cognitive channel that deals with the content; integrative motivation is more related to the emotional channel involving reactions to the text language as it is perceived.

The second step, according to the model, is an interaction between the reader's emotional and cognitive processes, which may give rise to conflicting goals—to read or to reject (e.g. story reading). This conflict happens especially when the emotional and cognitive phases have led to contradictory decisions, for instance, when the text is written in Hebrew but the content is culturally Arab. The initial emotional reaction of the Arab reader is positive, but the cognitive assessment about persisting in the task may be negative. Usually, this confusion can be resolved via meta-cognitive processes through the instrumental or integrative motivational components (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The meta-cognitive process in this case means that students persuade themselves that reading in L2 will be beneficial in the future, and environmental rewards will come (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989). It would appear plausible in this case that instrumental motivation, by way of meta-cognitive processes, leads to reading engagement with the text.

In fact, if the reader is motivated either by strong integrative or instrumental motivation, s/he is likely to become engaged in reading the text. In the second case, *instrumental* (positive) motivation (by way of meta-cognition) spurs the reader to act so as to fulfil his/her personal interests and aspirations (Hidi, 1990). (Of course, if the emotional evaluation is negative, there are negative emotions toward the text [content and language] which would presumably detract from comprehension.) On the other hand, if the reader's *integrative* motivation is very strong, involving the emotional system, this enables him/her to overcome other cognitive hindrances. If the emotional evaluation is negative, the result is negative attitudes toward the text (content and language) owing to the effect of the cognitive system (cognitive evaluation).

In sum, this model elaborates and expands social context models of L2 learning proposed by earlier investigators (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Schumann, 1986; Spolsky, 1989; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). These investigators agreed that certain variables affect learners' motivation, yet they stopped at this stage and did not provide a framework for addressing more complex L2 learning situations or questions such as the following.

- How do different types of motivation affect reading comprehension in complex learning situations (e.g. when two different cultures are involved, and the language of the text is of one culture while its content is of another)?
- What happens if the reader is motivated more towards the language of the text or more towards the content of the text?

As an illustration, one may start with a successful case—a constructed example—using familiar cultural content in L2 as the reading task. On seeing the script the reader may react negatively, and this reaction may adversely affect his/her

determination to read, or cause him/her to reject a serious reading of the text on account of the language. The content, which is familiar, will be perceived later, after a few words or sentences are read, owing to the need for cognitive elaborations. The perception and identification of the familiar cultural content will thereupon arouse positive attitudes (instrumental motivation) towards reading the text. Further, an interaction between the two channels will occur faster owing to the accessibility of the cultural background; and the greater the motivation, the faster the engagement in reading the text (familiar cultural context in L2). In this case, performance will be high because of cultural familiarity.

On the other hand, when the cultural content of the L2 text is unfamiliar, although instrumental motivation may help, the reader's performance and motivation are reduced. The reader may react negatively to the language and content, and the negative channels will interact to create a stronger negative attitude towards L2 learning. The reading results will be poor; in the long run readers will acquire unpleasant experiences with the L2 and its culture, namely more cumulative hostility and resentment towards the TL group, its language, and its culture.

A comparison of these two structured examples shows that the cultural content of an L2 text provides the learner with an opportunity to use his/her prior knowledge to learn more. The second example shows how ponderous, inflexible materials are imposed on learners, forcing them to match themselves and their learning process to fixed curricula, which usually compounds the L2 learning process with unsuccessful learning experiences.

The proposed L2 Reading Model for a problematic social context receives further support from the interactive compensatory model (Stanovich, 1980). The basic assumption of Stanovich's model is that reading deficiencies at any level in the processing hierarchy can be compensated by a greater use of information from other levels, and this compensation can take place irrespective of the level of the deficient process. Accordingly, teaching/learning L2 through familiar cultural contents draws on the prior knowledge that readers may use to compensate to some extent for inadequate vocabulary, weak syntax, and negative attitudes to reading in L2. These are the reader's deficient areas, which will be compensated by his/her strong area, namely, the cultural background. If the L2 learner has to learn information through the medium of incomprehensible and culturally distant content, the compensatory opportunities may be limited, leading to poor results.

The proposed model needs to be tested for some cognitive aspects, for example, instrumental motivation as a meta-cognitive process, cognitive interactions between text language and text content, and the timing of the various cognitive and affective processes.

Practical Implications

Stanovich (1986) states:

in short, the relationship between difficulty of the target word, the difficulty of the contextual material, the ability of the reader, and the amount of

contextual facilitation is a complex one. Note, however, that taking the difficulty of the contextual material into account does not change the source of individual difference, in contextual facilitation: they are directly determined by the decoding ability of the subject (and the difficulty level of the contextual material and of the target word). (p. 371)

Later in the same article Stanovich argues:

There are several factors contributing to Matthew effects in reading development. For example, the research cited above has pointed to reading exposure differences between individuals of different skill levels. This is an example of the important principle of organism–environment correlation: different types of organisms are selectively exposed to different types of environments. (p. 381)

These statements cast more light on the need for alternative teaching/learning materials to compensate for the 'difficulty of the contextual material'. Stanovich's argument can also be applied to L2 readers: teaching the second language through familiar cultural content will facilitate L2 learning and contribute to more supportive environments for 'organisms', that is, socially situated human beings. The understandable/familiar textual contents will motivate the readers and supply positive and successful experiences to their L2 learning process. Ideally, poor readers will become good readers and good readers will become even better readers. Investigators have suggested that students and text factors function interactively, so that a reader's deficiency may be compensated by a strength in another area (Stanovich, 1980). In our case Arab readers in Israel, while reading about their culture in Hebrew, may overcome difficult vocabularies and Hebrew syntax problems by compensating with their prior cultural knowledge. This notion, according to schema theory, serves as a scaffold to aid in encoding information from the text. A reader with more prior knowledge is able to comprehend better than a reader with less prior knowledge.

By contrast, teaching/learning L2 through unfamiliar cultural contents may insert more barriers into the L2 learning process, especially if the social context is unsupportive, where learners constitute a minority group that is required to learn the language of the majority group (the Israeli–Arab social context). The notion of 'culture-based L2 texts' should be seriously considered when the social context is problematic and does not allow natural social interaction between minority members and target language groups.

As implied by Stanovich (1986), understandable contextual materials are related to decoding ability, which may lead to better reading in the first language, and motivate the learner to more reading and exposure to verbal experiences. The same approach can be applied to readers in L2.

In addition, if readers' implicit cultural knowledge interacts with cultural textual content, then reading and understanding are more readily facilitated with familiar, cultural texts than with syntactically and rhetorically equivalent texts based on a less familiar culture (Carrell, 1987; Steffensen *et al.*, 1979). The same approach can be applied to texts demanding background knowledge which is discipline-specific (e.g.

science texts). That is, one can improve students' performance in reading a specific topic by building background knowledge on that specific topic through pre-reading activities (Graves & Palmer, 1981; Stevens, 1982; Graves & Cooke, 1986).

Krashen (1982), Carrell (1987), and Hidi (1990) argued that L2 curriculum content should be both interesting and relevant to the learner's daily life. The most appropriate way to apply these curricula is to focus on programmes that allow a high degree of individualisation; students should be required to make their own choices of reading materials out of a wide selection of appropriate texts (Dewey, 1913; Hidi & Baird, 1986; Ainley, 1987; Carrell, 1987; Hidi, 1990).

In short, there is an obvious case for teaching/learning L2 through comprehensible content, familiar cultural content, or any familiar background knowledge (the sciences, etc.) that are of high interest to the L2 learner, which can be implemented in individualised programmes based on the student's choices of reading materials. Further, diverse cultural information must be available and openly discussed in classrooms in which subcultures are evaluated, discussed, and read about, just as the mainstream culture is. Students of different ethnic backgrounds should participate in open personal interpretations and comparison sessions, accompanied by group activities in the classroom and out in society. This notion may not be admitted in a politically insecure social context, but it is permitted in multicultural societies such as in Canada. With such an approach, students are encouraged to interact with other readers to share and participate, and to hear other interpretations.

Curricula designers are encouraged to use materials that are relevant and meaningful to Arab students' lives while learning Hebrew in Israel. They should incorporate culturally familiar texts; texts with Arab customs and norms, Arab weddings in villages, cities, and tribes; Arab hospitality; Bedouin hospitality; Arab society in transition, Arab women's status in Arab societies, and so on. Further, it is also possible to incorporate some famous Arab folk tales and well-known Arab stories of renowned Arab writers that students are familiar with. This is very important for Israeli-Arab students; in fact, it is important for all students who perceive themselves to be in a subordinate position within their societies that their values and cultures be represented within the textual material of their L2 learning, especially when the social context is problematic.

In addition, programmes of L2 learning should include instrumental motivational activities, focusing on future benefits of L2 learning in the classroom and out in society. This suggestion is crucial in conflictual social contexts, where minorities learn the L2 as the language of the majority group. Great emphasis should be laid on students' awareness of the benefits of L2 learning through group activities in the classroom and in the outside world. Such awareness may be achieved by discussing an agenda of political issues in the atmosphere of an open forum, and by inducing students to elaborate, conclude and suggest solutions.

It is very important to ensure that the present model be tested in different situations and in different problematic social contexts. Attitudes of students towards L2 learning should be tested before and after using these kinds of topic, to test changes in students' attitudes and/or self-esteem as part of this alternative approach.

In sum, L2 learning in problematic social contexts should seriously consider these significant factors that facilitate L2 learning: instrumental motivation, interest, comprehensibility, and cultural textual contents. For each local case, one should consider the specific social-context differences as discussed in this article.

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