Implicit attitudes in language learning

Ali Al-Hoorie

Nottingham University, United Kingdom

Throughout its history, second language (L2) motivation research has been dominated by conscious variables (e.g., integrative motivation, intrinsic motivation, the ideal L2 self). These variables are conscious in the sense that the researcher assumes that learners are able to recognize and articulate what motivates them. Little work has been done to explore whether there are also unconscious motivators operating in L2 learning.

The present paper reports an empirical study examining the relevance of implicit (i.e., unconscious) attitudes in language learning. Undergraduate students (N = 311) learning English as a foreign language completed self-report measures related to the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, attitudes toward the L2 course (ATLC), and ethnocentrism. Implicit attitudes were operationalized using the Single-Target Implicit Association Test (ST-IAT, Karpinski & Steinman, 2006). The ST-IAT is a computerized reaction-time psychological experiment that requires the respondent to classify a series of stimuli to the right or left as fast as possible. Implicit attitudes are inferred from the respondent’s speed in the different tasks of the ST-IAT.

The results showed that L2 achievement was predicted positively by ST-IAT and ATLC, and negatively by ethnocentrism. The implications of these findings will be discussed. It is hoped that the audience will leave with an appreciation of the unconscious aspects of L2 learning.

References


Keywords: motivation, implicit attitudes, Implicit Association Test.