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Language learner beliefs from an attributional perspective

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Abstract

This qualitative study, aimed to analyze eight French-speaking learners' beliefs about English and English language learning. The data were obtained via semi-structured interviews. The study drew on Weiner's attribution theory of achievement motivation and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The novelty about this research is the employment of an attributional analysis framework to study and explain the learners' stated beliefs about English and English language learning.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, with the developments of cognitive psychology, language learners' beliefs have received remarkable attention. So far, L2 learner belief studies have looked for possible relationships between learner belief systems and various aspects of L2 learning and other related psychological constructs. Research into L2 beliefs continues to dominate the Foreign Language Learning (FLL) literature and shows no sign of diminishing (see Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005; Gabillon, 2005, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Hawkey, 2006; Kalaja and Barcelos, 2003; Kormos et al., 2011; Levine, 2003; Loewen et al., 2009; Wenden, 1986a, 1986b, 1995 and so forth).

The present study reports on eight French-speaking university students' beliefs about English and English language learning. The learners' beliefs were examined by drawing on Weiner's attribution theory of achievement motivation (1985, 1986) and Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986). The novelty about this study is

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the employment of an attributional analysis framework to study and explain the learners' stated beliefs about the English language and learning of this language.

1. Literature review

Heider (1958) claimed that people act on the basis of their beliefs and maintained that psychologists could learn a great deal from people's explanations and understandings of the events, and behaviors about them. He stressed the importance of taking ordinary people's beliefs seriously, whether these beliefs are valid or not, and suggested that beliefs must be taken into account when dealing with human behavior. The individual's explanations of his/her experiences and attributions s/he makes, therefore, are considered to be important because they are the individual's inferences (self-attributions) to understand and interpret the causes that s/he believes to be responsible for his/her own behavior, feelings, and attitudes (Ross 1976).

Weiner's (1985, 1986) attributional theory of achievement motivation provides a scheme for analyzing and understanding learner attributions in educational settings. In Weiner's attributional theory of achievement motivation, attributions play a significant role on people's behaviors. Attribution (causal ascription) is the key term in attribution theory and it refers to individuals' interpretations of the causes of events that happen to themselves and others (Weiner 1986). According to Weiner (1980), individuals use attributions to interpret and predict the possible consequences of their actions. Weiner's theory considers ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck as the key factors that influence attributions people ascribe for their achievements. Weiner (2000) proposed three properties of causes: locus (internal or external), stability (stable or unstable), and controllability (controllable or uncontrollable) (see Figure 1).

| <u>Properties of Cause</u> | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Types of Causal Ascriptions</u> | <u>Locus</u> | <u>Stability</u> | <u>Controllability</u> |
| | Internal or External | Stable or Unstable | Controllable or Uncontrollable |
| Ability | internal | stable | uncontrollable |
| Effort | internal | unstable | controllable |
| Task Difficulty | external | stable | uncontrollable |
| Luck | external | unstable | uncontrollable |

Fig. 1. Attribution model based on Weiner's attributional theory of achievement motivation

Weiner asserted that these three properties play an important role in shaping two key determinants of motivation: a) expectancy of future success and b) value ('...emotional consequences of goal attainment or non-attainment.'--Weiner 2000: 5). Weiner (2000) explained that when the individual perceives the cause 'stable' s/he will anticipate the same outcomes in the future. For instance, if the individual believes that s/he lacks the ability (which is internal locus, stable, and uncontrollable) to perform an action that s/he has already experienced and failed, then s/he will expect failure again and will not be willing to perform the task. If, for example, the student attributes his/her failure to a teacher that s/he perceives as unfair (which is external locus, stable, and uncontrollable), then s/he will anticipate failure again if s/he takes the same course from the same teacher.

Bandura (1986) claimed that self-referent beliefs are better indicators of individuals' behaviors than what they are actually capable of doing. In educational research literature, self-referent beliefs became a real research

interest with Bandura's sociocognitive theory (e.g. Zimmerman 1990; Schunk & Zimmerman 1997 etc.). Self-efficacy beliefs, which are considered to be the most important self-referent beliefs, are studied under self-efficacy theory--a sub-theory developed under the framework of social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986). Simply defined, self-efficacy beliefs refer to personal beliefs (judgments) about one's capabilities to engage in an activity or perform a task (Bandura 1986). "Self-efficacy beliefs revolve around the question of 'can'." (Pajares & Schunk 2002:20). Bandura (2006a) claimed that self-efficacy beliefs shape individuals' motivations, goals, outcome expectations (i.e. whether they expect their efforts to produce favorable or unfavorable outcomes), way of thinking, emotions, and their determination in front of difficulties. Bandura (2006a) acknowledged that the individual's successes help him/her develop strong sense of self-efficacy. On the other hand, the individual's repetitive failures weaken the individual's self-efficacy beliefs.

Bandura (1986) maintained that people choose to engage in tasks that they believe they have high efficacy and avoid the ones that they perceive beyond their capabilities. Learners who believe that they have difficulties often avoid or resist the subjects or activities for which their self-efficacy is weak (Margolis 2005). Bandura (2006b) asserted that self-efficacy beliefs play a significant role in the regulation of motivation. He maintained that people feel motivated to undertake challenges on the basis of their outcome expectations. The likelihood that people will act depends highly on whether they believe they can produce the required performance. Self-efficacy influences the type of attributions individuals make about their performances (Bandura 2006a). When people perceive strong self-efficacy they exert more effort and are more persistent and resilient in face of failure. According to self-efficacy theory, an individual with low self-efficacy beliefs perceives tasks to be fulfilled more difficult than they actually are. Thus, this belief restrains him/her from performing his/her best. Individuals with high self-efficacy belief are assumed to attribute their failure to insufficient effort rather than lack of ability or luck. That is, people with high self-efficacy believe that success can be achieved by effort, and in case of failure, they exert more effort when they engage in a similar task next time. However, individuals who have low self-efficacy beliefs attribute their failure to the lack of necessary skills and ability. For instance, people with low self-efficacy beliefs avoid performing tasks that require the skills that they believe they lack.

The interactions between learners' actions, their beliefs (self-efficacy, self-concept etc.), prior experiences, and attributions have been a topic of interest for many SLA (Second Language Acquisition) and FLL (Foreign Language Learning) researchers. Dörnyei and Otto (1998) maintained that, learners are influenced by their belief systems when they evaluate task demands before engaging in a task. They emphasized the importance of prior experience and its psychological consequence. They maintained that influenced by their experiences learners might generalize a failure in one classroom task to the whole language learning. They argued that learners assess their task outcomes based on their self-efficacy beliefs, perceived goal difficulty, perceived L2 competence, and the causal attributions about their prior experiences (e.g. failure and success). Dörnyei (2007) asserted that failure that is ascribed to stable uncontrollable factors such as low ability hinders future achievement; whereas failure that is attributed to unstable and controllable factors such as effort can be regulated. He therefore suggested that teaching/learning environments should work towards promoting effort attributions and prevent ability, and other-related attributions as much as possible. Williams and Burden's study (1999) revealed that majority of the attributions that the learners made about their school achievement pointed mainly to external factors (e.g. teachers) rather than personal effort. Graham (2003) who studied an L2 learner's attitude towards learning French discovered that this learner's attributions were related to lower perceived self-beliefs. The data she obtained suggested that the learner's negative attitude towards French stemmed from low self-efficacy and a maladaptive attributional style.

Research findings have also demonstrated that beliefs that language learners hold about a target foreign language and its culture affect their attitudes towards that language (Csizér & Dörnyei 2005). Many other empirical investigations have also found statistically significant connections between positive beliefs towards the L2 and L2 culture and various aspects of L2 learning motivation (e.g. Gardner 2001).

2. Aim of the study

This small-scale exploratory study reports on eight French students' stated beliefs about their like or dislike of English language learning and the English language. The study addresses attributions and self-referent beliefs such as self-efficacy beliefs and self-concept beliefs. The aim was: a) to elicit the causes the learners ascribed to their perceived like or dislike of English language learning; b) to examine the nature of these attributions; c) to look into the relationships between the learners' attributions, self-referent beliefs, perceived value of English language learning, and the marks they obtained in English.

3. Participants of the study

The participants in the study were eight adult male French learners of English who were studying at a two-year university program. The learners had eight to ten years of English language learning experience. The participants for this study were selected according to the scores they obtained in English. The score they obtained was the average of the marks obtained in all four skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening).

4. Methodology and Analysis

The study used semi-structured interviews as a research tool. The researcher prepared a set of questions (see below) but also allowed flexibility to ask other questions whenever it was necessary. The interviews were done in French and each individual learner's discourse items were transcribed and then translated into English. Weiner's (1985) attribution theory was applied to see the attributions each learner ascribed for their like or dislike concerning English and English language learning. The learner interviews were analyzed by focusing on whether the learners stated a like or a dislike towards learning English and the types of attributions they ascribed as causes. The researcher also attempted to establish links between the learners' beliefs and possible consequences of these stated beliefs on future learning. The main interview questions asked during the interviews were the following:

- 1) Do you like learning English?
- 2) Explain why/why not?
- 3) What is 'being good at English' for you?
- 4) Do you think you can get a better mark in your next English test?

Three students out of eight stated that they did not like the English language and/or English language learning (see *Student 1*, *Student 2*, and *Student 3*). Two out of eight were hesitant. These two students (*Student 4* and *Student 5*) referred to their past learning experiences as having negative effects on their foreign language learning. *Student 6*, *Student 7*, and *Student 8*, all expressed positive feelings towards both the English language and learning of this language.

4.1. Participants' attributions for 'I don't like English'

Student 1 revealed that he did not like learning English (see Table 1). He attributed his perceived dislike for English language learning—to his lower perceived L2 self-concept "I am not a good language learner" (an internal, stable and uncontrollable cause). The learner was convinced that he could not learn English because he perceived that he lacked the required L2 ability to learn English. He attributed his perceived L2 difficulty (or lower perceived L2 competence) as the consequence of his lack of ability to learn English. When the learner was asked what he meant by 'being good at English', he responded as: "Being able to speak and understand English". For this learner 'understanding and speaking English' represented a core belief, an implicit goal/expectation of

learning English. The learner's discourse analysis indicated that the learner believed that he failed to achieve this goal because he perceived that he lacked the ability to learn this language. The reason for this learner's negative attitude towards learning English seemed to originate from his negative self-referent beliefs (i.e. lower perceived L2 competence and negative self-concept) which have internal, stable and uncontrollable causal properties.

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 1's</i> stated belief: 'I don't like learning English' | |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> | "I am not a good language learner." | Attributes his dislike of English to his perceived lack of L2 ability and low L2 self-concept |
| Lower perceived ability in L2 learning (properties of cause: negative, present, internal, stable/uncontrollable) | | |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> | "I find English difficult. I can understand when I read the texts given in the class, without much difficulty, but I cannot speak and understand English-speaking people well" | Attributes his perceived L2 difficulty to his lower perceived self-efficacy in English |
| Perceived task difficulty (properties of cause : negative, present, internal, stable/uncontrollable) | | |
| <u>Goal/Expectation</u> | "Being able to speak and understand English-speaking people well" | |
| (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | | |
| Outcome | English mark obtained:9/20 | Fail |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | "No, I don't think I can" | The student has low expectancy of success in his next English test |

Table 1. Analysis of *Student 1's* discourse

Student 2, like *Student 1*, attributed the causes for his dislike of English language learning to his lower perceived L2 competence and his lower perceived L2 progress, which the learner believed to be beyond his control (see Table 2). *Student 2*, like *Student 1*, attributed his dislike to learning English to his lack of ability to learn this language. *Student 1's* perception of the importance of listening and speaking skills was also shared by *Student 2*. In short, he as well perceived speaking and understanding as being the goal of language learning, and was convinced that he failed to achieve this goal.

Table 2. Analysis of *Student 2*'s discourse

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 2</i> 's stated belief:: ' I don't like learning English' | |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> | "My English is not good." | Attributes his dislike of English to his lower perceived L2 competence |
| Lower perceived L2 competence (properties of cause: negative, present, internal, stable/uncontrollable) | | |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> | | Attributes his lower perceived L2 competence and his lack of progress as a cause for his non-achievement |
| Perceived repetitive failure (properties of cause: negative, past/present, internal, stable/uncontrollable) | "I have been learning English for more than eight years, yet I don't know much English." | |
| <u>Goal/Expectation</u> | "Having good speaking and listening competence" | |
| (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | | |
| <u>Outcome</u> | English mark obtained:8/20 | Fail |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | "I don't think I will" | The student does not expect to succeed in his next English test |

Both *Student 2* and *Student 1*'s discourses showed that these learners did not expect to get a better mark in their next English test. Bandura (2006a) asserted that learners who perceive that they did not have the required competence would believe that they could not produce desired effects by their actions and would not be willing to participate in classroom activities. In the case of *Student 1* and *Student 2* their lower perceived L2 competence (because of their perceived lack of ability, perceived L2 difficulty and lower perceived L2 progress) was attributed as the major cause for their negative feelings towards L2 learning. These learners' negative beliefs might affect their future learning behaviors negatively.

The case of *Student 3* (see Table 3) appeared to be slightly different from the first two learners, whose beliefs were directly related to their lower perceived L2 competence and L2 self-concept. *Student 3* attributed his dislike of learning English to the nature of the English language. This learner expressed an explicit negative attitude towards the English language. His discourse also revealed that he did not perceive English as being relevant to his goals and future expectations. This learner stated that he could get a better mark in his next English test if the test was easy (external, uncontrollable causal ascription). The data obtained indicated that the behavioral consequence of *Student 3*'s L2 beliefs would probably be non-participation in the L2 learning activities.

Table 3. Analysis of *Student 3's* discourse

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 3's</i> stated belief: 'I don't like learning English.' | |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived dislike for English and English language learning (properties of cause: negative, present, internal, stable) | "I don't like English because It sounds strange." | Attributes his dislike of learning English to his dislike of this language |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived value for another foreign language (properties of cause: positive, present, internal, stable) | "I prefer learning Spanish." | Ascribes his lack of interest in learning English to his preference for Spanish |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived insignificance of English course (properties of cause : negative, present, internal, stable) | "...and also I really don't think that I'll need English after I finish school. I already have a lot of other important school subjects to worry about." | Attributes his lack of interest in learning English to his perceived insignificance of learning English |
| <u>Expectation/Goal</u> | (Not relevant) | |
| (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | | |
| <u>Outcome</u> | English mark obtained:10/20 | Pass |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | "Perhaps, I will. I don't know. It depends on the test." | The student has some expectancy of success. He expresses that the test (task difficulty) will determine whether he will be successful or not |

4.2. Participants' attributions for 'I like English but...'

Student 4 and *Student 5* expressed dual feelings about English and English language learning and attributed their non-achievement to an external cause. They both referred to their past L2 learning situations as unfavorable and ascribed their prior L2 experiences as a cause for their lower perceived L2 competence and at the same time as a cause for their dislike for learning English.

Student 4's discourse revealed that he perceived English language learning as instrumental to achieving his goals. He believed that learning English would be useful for getting a good job and for his school achievement (see Table 4). *Student 4* believed that his L2 learning experience at high school was the major reason for his dislike for English classes (past, external, uncontrollable cause).

He stated that at high school his teachers focused mainly on the teaching of grammar, which he did not find useful and enjoyable to learn. In short, he attributed his teachers' language teaching approach at high school as a cause for his low L2 competence.

Although previously he attributed his teachers' emphasis on grammar teaching as a cause for his non-attainment, when the learner was asked what he considered as 'being good at English', he explained that for him knowing English meant 'being good at grammar and speaking'. When he was pointed out that he considered emphasis on grammar learning/teaching as one of the causes for his dislike of English, he responded as follows: 'I don't like doing grammar exercises. I never felt that I learnt English when we did grammar lessons. But I know that I need to know grammar well to speak and understand English. Now we speak a lot and the teacher corrects our grammar mistakes after. It's better.'

Table 4. Analysis of *Student 4's* discourse

| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 4's</i> stated belief: '(I think) I like English but...' | |
|---|---|---|
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived L2 value (properties of cause: positive, present, internal/external, stable) | "I believe English is an important language ...for my future career, for my studies etc." | Perceives English as a significant language to learn (for his studies/future career) and attributes this as a cause for his interest in English |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Previous L2 situation (properties of cause: negative, past, external, unstable/ uncontrollable) | "But, I didn't have good teachers at lycée (high school)". I have problems with English. "They mostly taught grammar...not useful....not enjoyable" | Attributes his low L2 competence in English to his teachers' teaching in his past L2 learning situation (i.e. not having good teachers) |
| <u>Goal/Expectation</u> (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | "knowing grammar and speaking well" | |
| Outcome | English mark obtained:12/20 | Satisfactory |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | "I don't know. Well! I don't think. I have never learnt English well. Perhaps it's a little late now." | The student has low expectancy of getting a better mark. He attributes it to his lower perceived L2 self-concept. |

Student 5 ascribed internal self-referent causes for his lower perceived L2 achievement (see Table 5). He explained that he was not interested in learning English when he was a high school student. He recognized his previous lack of interest to be the major reason for his lower perceived L2

competence. However, he added that he perceived English learning as being important for his future career and his studies.

Table 5. Analysis of *Student 5's* discourse

| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 5's</i> stated belief: 'I like English but...' | |
|---|---|---|
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Lack of interest (properties of cause: negative, past, internal, stable/uncontrollable) | "I was not interested in English when I was at the secondary/high school." | Attributes his perceived lack of interest in his previous English classes as a cause for his lower perceived L2 competence. |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived L2 significance(properties of cause: positive, present, external/internal) | "I know that learning English is important. | Perceives English as a significant language to learn . |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Lower perceived L2 competence (properties of cause: negative, present, internal) | "But my English is not good. My speaking is not good, at all." | Attributes his lower perceived L2 competence to his previous lack of interest |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Intrinsic interest in L2 activities (dimension: positive, present, external/internal) | But I like the activities we do in class now. I even feel that my English is getting better | Attributes his appreciation of English and his progress in English classes to the nature of the classroom activities used in his present L2 classes |
| <u>Goal/Expectation</u> (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | "Speaking with English people fluently" | |
| Outcome | English mark obtained:12/20 | Satisfactory |
| Expectancy of future success) (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | I don't know...It is possible | Low expectancy of getting a better mark |

Student 5, as well as *Student 1*, *Student 2* and *Student 4*, equated 'being good at English' to being able to speak this language. Like the other participants, this learner also considered his lower perceived L2 competence as an obstacle for his L2 enjoyment. However, this particular learner, despite his lower perceived L2 competence, expressed a positive attitude towards his present L2

situation. He stated that he liked the activities he did in his current English classes. He also maintained that he made progress with his English. This change in *Student 5's* learning conditions, therefore, led him to conciliate his attitude towards learning English more positively. However, his speech was still cautious and uncertain.

4.3. Participants' attributions for 'I like English'

Student 6, Student 7, and Student 8 expressed positive attitudes towards English language learning. *Student 8* expressed high intrinsic interest in the English language itself, as well as English language learning. *Student 6* and *Student 7's* discourses followed more or less the same thematic pattern (see Tables 6 & 7). Their opening remarks acknowledged their positive perceptions of English language learning. They both expressed positive views about their present L2 learning situation and attributed their like for learning English to their L2 task enjoyment in their current English classes.

Table 6. Analysis of *Student 6's* discourse

| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 6's</i> stated belief: I like English | |
|--|---|---|
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived intrinsic interest in L2 learning. (properties of cause: positive, present, internal) | "I think I like learning English." | Attributes his interest in this language to his liking for learning this language |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Favorable L2 conditions. (properties of cause: positive, present, external) | "English classes are different from other classes. We are active. We talk, we do things." | Attributes his liking for learning English to his active involvement in class activities |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Favorable L2 conditions. (properties of cause: positive, present, external) | "I like the listening and speaking activities that we do. They are mostly fun." | Attributes his liking for learning English to doing listening and speaking activities in his L2 class |
| <u>Goal/Expectation</u> (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | Understanding people when they talk and speaking well | |
| Outcome | English mark obtained:14/20 | Good |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | Ohm... I hope. | The student has expectancy of a better achievement in English. |

Table 7. Analysis of *Student 7*'s discourse

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 7</i> 's stated belief: 'I like English' | |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived intrinsic interest in L2 learning (properties of cause: positive, present, internal, stable, uncontrollable) | "I enjoy English classes a lot." | Attributes his interest in this language to enjoying L2 classes. |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Favorable L2 situation (properties of cause: positive, present, external, unstable, uncontrollable) | "We use computers... for example we listen using the internet, we use the internet dictionaries ... we do other activities, for example we record our voices if we want and listen..." | Attributes his liking for learning English to his liking for the learning activities in his present L2 learning situation. |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Favorable L2 situation (properties of cause: positive, present, external, unstable, uncontrollable) | "I love talking in English ... we have the opportunity to talk in our English classes. We did not do such things at lycée." | Attributes his liking for learning English to having opportunities to talk in L2 classes. |
| Goal/Expectation (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | Speaking without an accent | |
| Outcome | English mark obtained:15/20 | Good |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | I think with our new teacher I will. | The student has expectancy of a better achievement in English. |

The data revealed that both *Student 6* and *Student 7*, like all the other learners, recognized language learning primarily for oral communication. The data obtained from *Student 6* and *Student 7* indicated that external factors such as the activities used in their English classes had an influence on these learners' motivations and consequently on their interest in the L2 tasks used in their English classes. The interview data also indicated that the learning activities used in their present English classes correlated with their expectations and goals.

Student 8, among all the participants, was the one with the highest positive attitude towards the L2. The student expressed a wholesome intrinsic interest in both the English language and English language learning (see Table 8). He attributed his interest in this language to his strong liking of this language. He maintained that he especially enjoyed talking in English. He also revealed that he perceived English as a language with a high international status and he expressed willingness to participate in any kind of classroom tasks in his English classes. *Student 8*, like the other participants equated knowing English to the ability to communicate in this language well. However, differently from rest of the participants, this learner's goals and expectations concerning the learning of English indicated much higher standards. The learner's discourse indicated that his higher

perceived incentive value for this foreign language motivated him towards achieving a native speaker level of English. This learner had the highest mark from the English course and his discourse suggested that he was also the one with the highest intrinsic (and integrative) motivation.

Table 8. Analysis of *Student 8's* discourse

| (Do you like learning English?) | <i>Student 8's</i> stated belief: 'I like English (I like the English language)' English | |
|--|---|--|
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived value of English (properties of cause : positive, present, internal, stable, uncontrollable) | "English is a nice language." | Attributes his interest in this language to a higher perceived value for this language (high intrinsic interest in the L2) |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived intrinsic interest in L2 (properties of cause : positive, present, internal, unstable, uncontrollable) | "I like talking in English. I sometimes chat on the net (internet) when I play games. I like learning English." | Attributes his willingness to communicate in English to his liking for this language (high intrinsic interest in the L2) |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Intrinsic interest in L2 learning (properties of cause : positive, present/past, internal, stable, uncontrollable) | "Yes, I enjoyed learning English when I was at lycée, as well." | Ascribes his enjoyment of learning English to his liking for this language |
| <u>Causal ascription</u> Perceived L2 significance (properties of cause : positive, present, internal/external) | "Learning English is a must for everybody. It's an international language." | Perceives English as a language with high incentive value |
| Goal/Expectation (What is 'being good at English' for you?) | Being able to communicate well in English | |
| Outcome | English mark obtained: 17/20 | Very Good |
| Expectancy of future success (Do you think you will get a better mark next time?) | "I don't know... I already have a good mark. Well, it's possible I think." | The student has expectancy of a better achievement in English. |

5. Overall

The learners' attributions indicated that these learners' perceived 'like' or 'dislike' of English language learning was influenced by their beliefs about: a) L2 competence and self; b) L2 learning situation and L2 goals and expectations; and d) the perceived value of the English language. These learners in general had the tendency to attribute failure either to external uncontrollable factors such

as teachers or teaching/learning situations or internal uncontrollable factors such as low ability and low self-efficacy. The learners' interview data suggested that lower perceived self-concept and lower perceived L2 competence were ascribed as principal causes for their lack of interest in learning English. The students' grades also correlated with their perceived L2 competence, self-concept beliefs and their likes or dislikes for learning English.

Favorable L2 learning situation was one of the main factors, which the learners attributed as a cause for their enjoyment in learning English and their attainment in English classes. During the interviews, the students expressed that they liked English classes mainly because of their present favorable L2 learning situation. They attributed this positive feeling to external factors such as relevant, interesting, and useful L2 activities their present English classes offered (e.g. the use of the Internet, speaking activities, variety of activities which encourage student participation etc.). The activities that corresponded to their expectations and goals seemed to have significant influence on their interest in learning. *Student 4*, *Student 5*, *Student 6*, and *Student 7* all referred to their learning situations indicating how the L2 situation influenced their feelings towards learning English. This study also suggested that belief and attitude change could be possible with the change of conditions and methods used in language learning settings: "Now we speak a lot and the teacher corrects our grammar mistakes after. It's better"; "...but I like the activities we do in class now...I feel that my English is getting better."

6. Discussion

The research on student learning has demonstrated that learners' perception of their learning situation has a significant impact on their attitudes towards the L2 they are learning (Williams & Burden 1999). Pajares and Schunk (2002) suggested that research should focus on student beliefs in order to understand why students choose to do certain activities and avoid others, why they achieve and why they fail to achieve. Zeldin and Pajares (2000) asserted that learners who believe that they do not have the required skills will not engage in tasks in which those skills are required and these beliefs about their competencies will affect "the choices they make, the effort they put forth, their inclinations to persist at certain tasks, and their resiliency in the face of failure." (Zeldin & Pajares 2000: 215). Although a number of the above-mentioned issues concerning learner beliefs have been explored and verified through research done in the field of educational psychology, there is still need for more research in the area of L2 learner attributions to have better understanding of learners' perceptions and interpretations of their learning situations.

Providing ways through which learners can exercise some control over their learning environment is highly recommended in order to enhance both self-efficacy beliefs and intrinsic interest in learning (Bandura 2006b). Educationalist have also asserted that providing learning environments where learners work collaboratively, and creating natural environments in which real communication takes place, would enhance learners' self-concept beliefs. They also recommend that teachers should consider individual differences and use variety of task types that appeal to different individuals' needs and interests to improve learners' self-efficacy beliefs. However, we have not yet had substantial research on the types of classroom tasks that enhance self-beliefs and learning. Thus, applied linguistic research should continue to look into the factors that influence L2 learners' task and learning preferences and investigate how these are related to learners' self-belief systems. I believe that researching the

nature of the relationship between prior classroom experiences, learners' task preferences, self-beliefs and learner attributions is a promising path of inquiry.

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