

A mixed method study of motivation and inter-cultural contact of international students in the UK



Judit Kormos in collaboration with
Kata Csizer and Janina Iwaniec

Social-psychological approach to contact

- ▶ Allport (1954) – contact changes attitudes and behavior of groups and individuals towards one another, and in turn these influence further contact
- ▶ Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) – familiarity leads to in liking through reductions of uncertainty and anxiety – main mediating factor is inter-group anxiety

Contact in SLA

- ▶ Clement and Kruidenier (1985) frequent and pleasant contact experience results in increased linguistic self-confidence
- ▶ Clement, Noels and Denault (2001) contact influences the identification profile of language learners

Link between contact and motivation in study-abroad research

- ▶ Isabelli-Garcia (2006) and Hernandez (2010)
- ▶ – integrative motivation and positive attitudes had a positive effect on interaction with NS
- ▶ Kinginger (2008) – complex interaction between students' identities, perceptions and engagement with the host context

Research questions of our study

- ▶ How can the language learning motivation and contact experiences of international students in the investigated programme be characterized?
- ▶ How do motivational variables and contact experiences vary over a period of one academic year?

Research method

- ▶ Questionnaire survey with 70 international students administered three times during the academic year
- ▶ Interviews with 10 students and 2 teachers



Context

- ▶ EAP programme on a university campus
- ▶ Students take language proficiency exam and an exam in their selected area of study
- ▶ 15 hours of EAP instruction
- ▶ 80% of students is Chinese L1 speaker, rest from a variety of countries (mainly Arabic and Russian speaking)
- ▶ Students accommodated on campus, often with native speaker flatmates
- ▶ Excursions, quiz nights

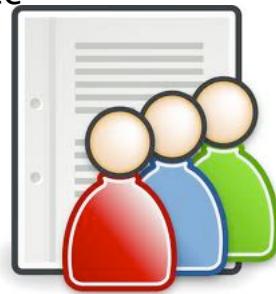
Participants – Questionnaires

- ▶ 70 international students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds –Chinese (73%), Arabic 8%
- ▶ Level of proficiency 4.5 to 5.5 IELTS-B1–B2
- ▶ 41% of male and 59% female
- ▶ Ages ranged between 17 and 24.



Interviews

- ▶ 10 students: 4 Hong Kong Chinese, 2 China, 1 Vietnamese, Pakistani, Indian and Kazakh (5 male, 5 female)
- ▶ 2 teachers: one native and one non-native (1 male and 1 female), one highly experienced, one with 2 years of experience
- ▶ Initial level of proficiency: B1



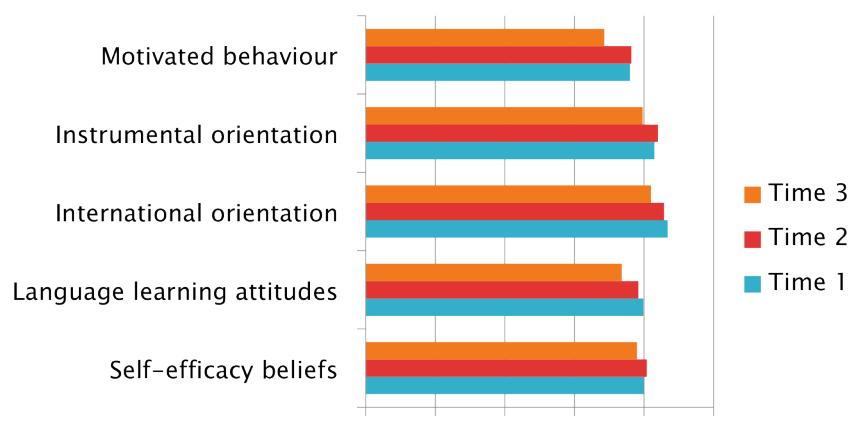
Constructs covered in the questionnaires and interviews

Questionnaires: 59 items –frequency of direct spoken and written contact, media contact, the perceived importance of contact, motivated behavior, language learning attitudes, self-efficacy beliefs and three language learning goals: instrumental, knowledge and international orientations

Interviews: – students – reasons for changes in these variables during the academic year, teachers – characterization of the program and the profile of the students

Results and discussion

The characterization of motivation



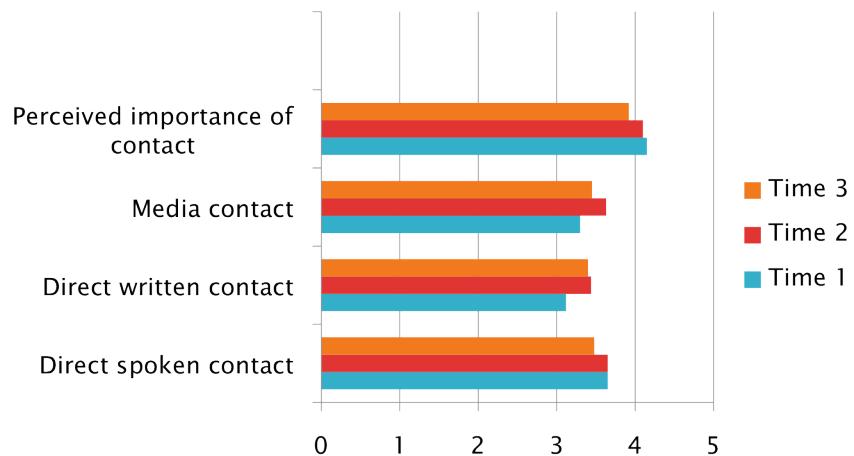
Characterization of motivation

- ▶ strong instrumental goals
- ▶ high importance to the international status of English
- ▶ favorable self-efficacy beliefs
- ▶ positive language learning attitudes
- ▶ But lower level of reported effort

Qualitative data about motivational effort

- ▶ “they sit there and they read a text or they’re doing an exercise sort of with as little effort as they can put in” Teacher 1
- ▶ “90% of them have done exactly the minimum requirements and nothing more” Teacher 2
- ▶ “I am not confident I can improve my English because I am very afraid to talk to other people” Irene

The characterization of contact



Importance of contact

- ▶ High importance of contact
- ▶ Language learning
- ▶ Intercultural knowledge and awareness

Infrequent contact with native speakers

"When I came here, I faced a real problem, the problem that sometimes it's hard to start talking because you start thinking what if I say something wrong. What if these people will laugh at me, what if they think I don't know anything. They won't be willing to talk to me again."

Reasons:

- ▶ lack of the basic conditions necessary for successful contact, as proposed in previous studies: equal status, common goals, co-operation and institutional support (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)
- ▶ Low level of L2 communication skills
- ▶ Communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation

Socio-environmental clues

- ▶ Chinese student

"My flatmate. This happened once. He knocked on my door and I can't understand what he said. Then after the night he seldom talk to me."

Socio-environmental clues

"interlocutors' behaviors that explicitly or implicitly convey negative attitudes toward learners [...] may also cause learners to feel that their efforts to communicate are invalid, and that they are disregarded as respected, accepted human beings among the members of the L2 society." (Aveni, 2005, p. 71).

Contact with international speakers

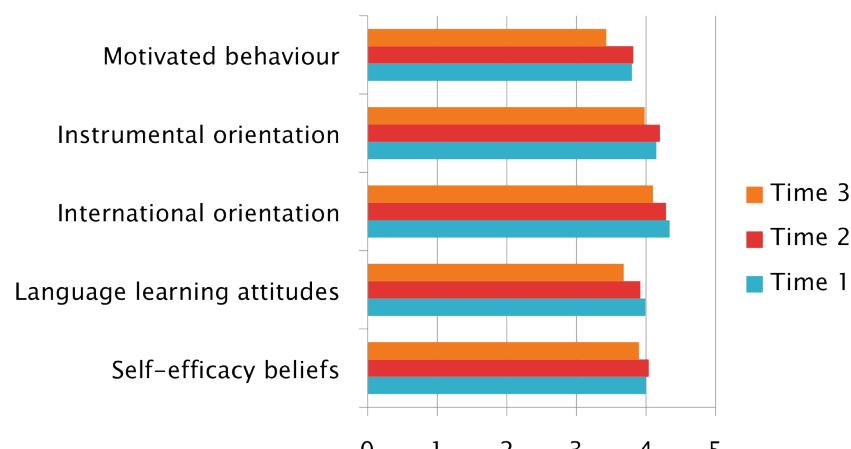
- ▶ Slightly more frequent
- ▶ Less anxiety provoking
- ▶ Depends on the size of the L1 group

"They are in the same situation as me. I think most Asian people are quite shy. This might be suitable with me so I can speak with them more freely than when I speak with native speakers"

Differences in the frequency of direct contact depending on L1 background

Chinese students engaged in direct spoken contact significantly less frequently than non-Chinese students at Time 1 ($t = 3.36, p = 0.001$) and Time 2 ($t = 3.43, p = 0.001$) but not at Time 3 ($t = 1.61, p = 0.10$)

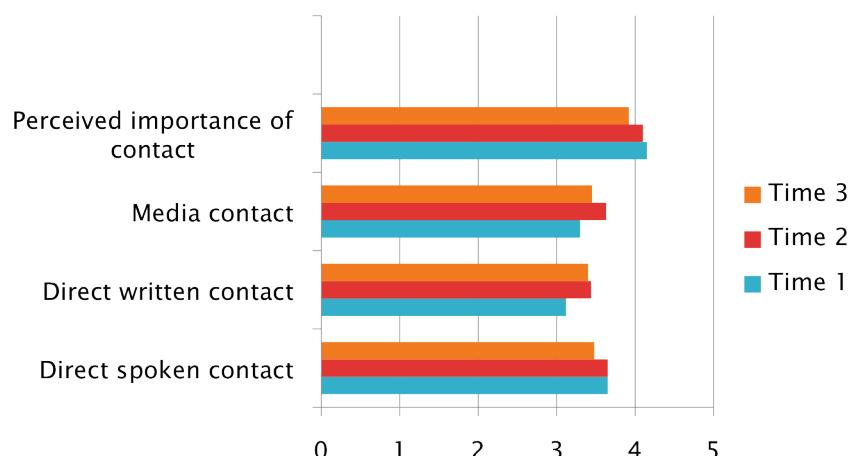
Changes in motivational variables



Changes in motivational variables

- ▶ Significant decrease between Time 1 and Time 3 and Time 2 and Time 3 (the effect size is large except for self-efficacy beliefs – medium)
- ▶ Language ceases to be the object of study and becomes a tool to acquire content and knowledge in their academic discipline
- ▶ Students focus on their academic field

Changes in contact variables

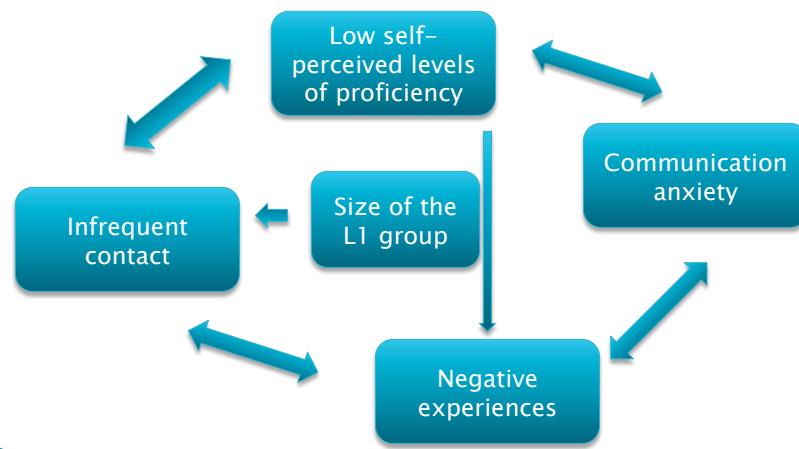


Changes in contact variables

- ▶ A significant decrease in all the variables except for direct written and media contact



Reasons for decrease in direct spoken contact



Exceptional cases

- ▶ Successful inter-cultural adaptation
- ▶ Example for a widening social circle and network – female student from Kazakhstan

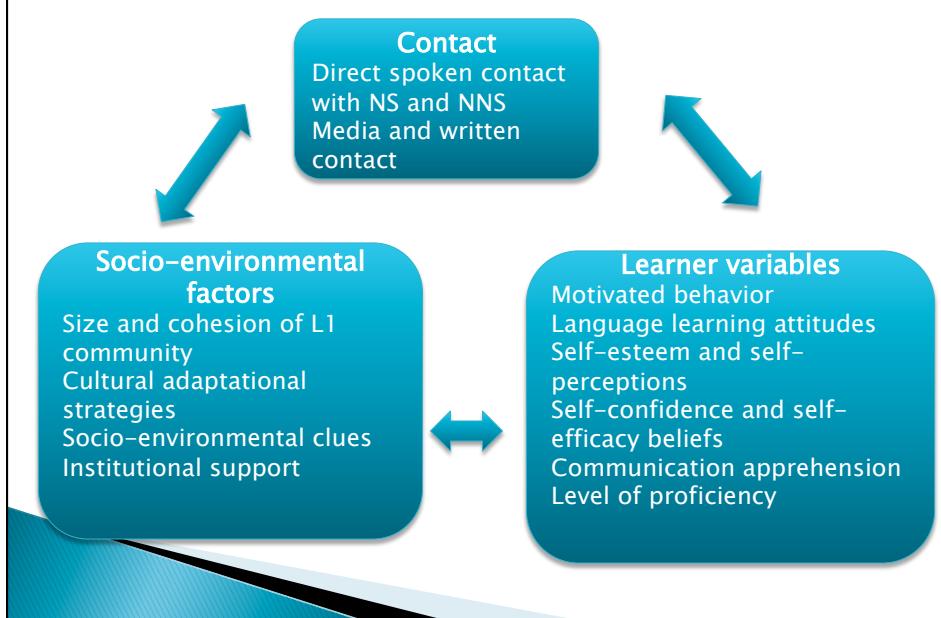
“Then in November, I got to know lots of people from my country ... so I was missing home like homesick so I spent more time with them. Then I got adjusted to it and so I still kept in contact with my flatmates but now I've got friends from Pakistan from India.”

The protection of self-esteem

- ▶ Another successful case of adaptation in the target language culture – male student from Pakistan

“because these two English students live next to me so day one, they gave me a positive response towards me. They started to interact with me properly, they respected me as a foreigner, they helped me out, so like they've made me feel comfortable around them.”

An overview of factors



Implications

- institutional support that helps hosts to understand the feelings, attitudes and forms of behavior of international students would also be needed

