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# **Context-Perception Model of Third Language Learning Motivation**

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## *Abstract*

Through Matsumoto's recent studies (2009, 2011) on foreign language learners' motivation in Australian context, a third cultural factor has been detected. Both studies have revealed that besides the conventional account of the cultural distance between learners' own culture and that of target language, the distance between learners' own culture and the Australian educational culture in which their language learning occurs also influences the learners' motivational state. That is, when learners learn a second foreign language in the second language educational context, this additional third culture plays an additional role which affects learner motivation. The study of cultural distance as a factor affecting motivation further must consider student perceptions of learning events, because they perceive the same learning and environmental factors differently according to their cultural backgrounds. As a result, their appraisals of events affect their motivation. Based on these considerations, a new framework of third language (L3) learning motivation is proposed and discussed.

Keywords: Cultural distance, Educational context, L3 learning, Motivation, Self-efficacy

## **1. Introduction**

The study of motivation in the second language acquisition (SLA) has branched out in various directions in recent years since the extended discussions in the 1990's regarding a number of issues, including ongoing discussion regarding the validity of Gardner and Lambert's (1959, 1972) claims for the superiority of integrative orientation over instrumental one, and the need of more open-ended research on the second language (L2) learners' motivation. One recent development in the study of motivation has been the introduction of the concept of "self" in the L2 Motivational Self System by Dörnyei (2005). He re-conceptualized L2 learners' integrativeness that Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced as the driving force to narrow the gap between the learners' real self and the future goals of the ideal self. Also culture has attracted researchers' attention as a factor that also influences learners' motivation in a complex way (e.g. Chizwick & Miller, 2005; Schumann, 1986; Svanes, 1987; Wen, 1997). L2 learners must go through intricate learning events and they perceive each learning event based on their previous learning experiences and L1 cultural backgrounds. This paper will take these concepts as the basis for the development of the proposed model and discuss three main factors, namely

cultural/educational distances, learner perception of events and their levels of proficiency as a representation of their learning experiences, and how they work to motivate L2 learners from different educational backgrounds learning L3 as a foreign language in the learning context of Australian formal language courses.

## **2. Research Background**

Since the turn of the century, study of L2 learners' motivation has moved in the directions of considering L2 learners' cognition of various factors that may affect their motivation for learning an L2. This research trend has reflected on the researchers' strong advocacy of the introduction of findings theorized in the cognitive psychology based on the more formal educational context (see Dörnyei, 1990, 1994a, 1994b; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). One of the foundational studies in this direction is the Process Model of motivation (Dörnyei, 2000; Dörnyei & Otto, 1998), in which the fluctuating nature of L2 motivation in its orientations and intensity during the lengthy process of L2 learning was first emphasized. The Process Model separated the L2 learning process into three phases; pre-learning, learning, and post-learning phases, and claimed that different motivational forces play a different role at each stage of learning respectively, and also L2 learners' various internal and external factors may influence each motivational force in either positive or negative ways. Among the three phases, the learning phase is the stage in which actual L2 learning occurs. The executive type of motivation works to help learners persist in their learning of the target language. The Process Model has shed light on the motivational framework, focusing on what kind of motivational force works in what way at each stage of learning process, as well as what internal and external elements influence each type of motivation. This approach to the study of L2 motivation is well contrasted with the more conventional approach introduced as a pioneering work by Canadian researchers led by Robert Gardner in the 60's and 70's. The Socio-educational Model of Gardner (1985) was based on the L2 learners' integrativeness towards a target language community, which is primarily developed in the social milieu in which the L2 learners grow up and which serves as the basis of their motivation to learn the language of the target community in order to be integrated into the community as a member. This social-psychology based paradigm of the L2 motivation focuses on L1 culture in the milieu as the shell of the development of certain attitudes towards the target language and culture. Here, the culture has a one-directional effect from learners' own towards the target culture, and the society rather than individual is more emphasized as the factor affecting the L2 learners' motivation.

The study of motivation in L2 learning has long viewed culture as an important factor that affects L2 learners' perceptions, behaviour, self-efficacy, and actual learning performances, and as a result their motivational predispositions. For example, in early studies of cultural distance, Svanes (1987) investigated the cultural distance between different L1s and that of a target language, and how it affects the levels of achievement in the target language learning. He found that the closer the distance, the higher in the proficiency

which learners are likely to achieve. Schumann's Acculturation Model (1986) holds that the social distance between L1 and L2 may be the crucial factor in the development of integrative motive among learners. Such a smaller distance then promotes acculturation, so that learners are able to more successfully integrate into the target culture and develop a higher L2 proficiency. Chizwick and Miller (2005) similarly claimed that immigrants to the US could develop a higher proficiency in English, as the cultural and linguistic distance between their original L1 and L2 English is smaller. Although the valid and reliable measurement of cultural distance has consistently experienced criticism, the studies have shown similar results that a larger cultural distance could be a distracting factor that may prevent L2 learners from acquiring higher target language proficiency.

The original claim that Gardner and his associates made (e.g. Gardner, 1968, 1980, 1988; Gardner and Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, Day, & MacIntyre, 1992) was that L2 learners who are integratively motivated are more successful in acquiring a higher L2 proficiency compared to those who are instrumentally motivated. That is, L2 learners who are oriented with the desire to be a part of the target community have more chance to develop a higher proficiency in the language of the community than the learners who are interested in the utilitarian value of the target language, such as being ahead of others, getting a promotion or passing an examination. Despite Gardner's strong insistence on the claim, a number of follow-up studies (e.g. Chihara & Oller, 1978; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Lukmani, 1992) frequently produced contradicting results during the 1970's and 80's. After decades of inconclusive arguments on the superiority of integrative orientation for successful L2 acquisition, Dörnyei (2005) introduced the L2 Motivational Self System in which L2 learners are theorized to be motivated in reference to an "ideal self". L2 learners need to self-regulate, in a balance between promotion focus on where the learners want to be and prevention focus on where the learners ought to be. The promotion focus promotes learners' intrinsic motivation and prevention focus, extrinsic motivation. In this theory, Dörnyei re-conceptualized Gardner's "integrativeness" as a motivational force narrowing the gap between the real self and the ideal self. The third component of "L2 learning experiences" in the Self System is regarded to affect the learners' executive motivation related to the immediate learning environment and experience, but Dörnyei (2009, p. 29) stated the need of future research in order to elaborate the self-aspects of the introduced system.

In recent studies, learning context has also become an important issue for discussing the L2 learners' motivation. Especially for foreign language learning, learning context is the social environment which is closely related to the learners' cultural beliefs and behaviour. Kozaki & Ross (2011) stated that environmental influences can be regarded as the external factor of motivation and they impact and mediate language learners' motivational state. And especially in foreign language learning, this social environment could be synonym for learners' cultural background, which is most apparently manifested in their learning behaviour in a classroom, because majority of foreign language

classrooms generally have mono-cultural backgrounds. Depending the cultural background of the learners, their preferences for learning styles and their attitudes towards a particular L2 and its culture can be determined (Oxford, Hollaway, & Horton-Murrilo, 1992). Psaltou-Joycey (2008) reported that cultural background is the most significant variable affecting the choice of learning strategies among learners with different cultural backgrounds. Cultural background may thus be regarded as a significant factor that may influence L2 learners attitudinal, behavioural, and motivational predisposition, but some researchers believe that more specific institutional context in which L2 learning takes place may override the power of cultural background; therefore, the classroom context as the social environment and cultural background should be considered separately. For example, Gan (2009) investigated Chinese mainland students and Hong Kong university students learning different discipline areas to identify levels of self-directed learning, the use of strategies and the attitudes and motivation. Gan found that despite the expectations of Confucian-based Asian style learning, student learning styles were more specifically influenced from situation-specific factors, including language proficiency, teaching methodology, and assessment practices (p. 43). Julkunen (2001) stated that “cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning situations affect motivation differently” (p. 30). That is, learners’ perception of the learning experience, including various internal and external factors in each language course, needs to be examined more closely than statically categorizing learners according to their cultural backgrounds and discussing their motivational behaviour only based on their cultural backgrounds.

The above argument extends the discussion of motivation to the L2 learners’ perceptions of their own learning experiences, and these perceptions may be affected by learners’ cultural background and learning social context. Ushioda (2001) has emphasized the importance of examining L2 learners’ perceptions of their individual learning experiences that affect their short- and long-term motivation and persistence in the L2 learning. Though learners may have the same experience learners, they perceive it differently; thus, they may be motivated or demotivated based on their perceptions of the learning event. The same learner may even perceive the same experience differently if he or she perceives it based on different prior learning experiences. Taking the above discussion into consideration, the present paper will focus on three features relating to the discussion of L2 learners’ motivation: dual cultural distances, perceptions of L3 learning events, and learners’ proficiency in terms of their level of integration into learning context.

### **3. Context-Perception Model of Motivation**

#### **3.1. Background to the Model**

Foreign language learning in a formal context, such as in a language course in a school setting, may always have a clash between two cultures. One is the learners’ own and the other is that of the target language. In this setting, learners generally represent the majority of the class of mono-lingual background, such as a class of English as a foreign language students in a high school in Japan.

Cultural distance has been investigated in terms of student motivational traits and L2 learning performances. Wen (1997) studied Asian-background students learning Chinese as a foreign language at university in the US. She found a problem with the students' level of self-efficacy due to cultural closeness between the students' background and the target language. Due to the cultural closeness to the target language, the students unrealistically assumed the learning of Chinese would be easy for them; therefore, when they realized unexpected difficulty in learning the language, they were more likely to be demotivated or drop-out of the course. Matsumoto (2009) studied university students' continuation/discontinuation of their Japanese language learning in Australia and investigated the relationship between the students' cultural backgrounds and their intentions for the continuation of learning at the university course. 19 elementary and 29 intermediate level students with a Western background and 27 elementary and 18 intermediate level students with an East-Asian background were asked about their intentions for continuing/discontinuing their study in the next semester using a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of each course. These Asian-background students were international students studying Japanese as L3 in the L2 English educational context of Australia. One of the major findings was that students with an East-Asian background at the elementary level of the course were more likely to drop out from the course compared to the students with a Western background. However, this was not found among the Asian background students at the intermediate level. See the duplicated table from Matsumoto (2009: 10.7) below.

Table 1. Inter-culture comparison of intentions for persistence at the end of a course

Culture	Level		Continue	Discontinue	Total
East-Asian	Elementary	Count	15	12	27
		% within level	55.6	44.4	100
	Intermediate	Count	16	2	18
		% within level	88.9	11.1	100
	Total	Count	31	14	45
		% within level	68.9	31.1	100
Western	Elementary	Count	15	4	19
		% within level	78.9	21.1	100
	Intermediate	Count	27	2	29
		% within level	93.1	6.9	100
	Total	Count	42	6	48
		% within level	87.5	12.5	100

Chi-square Test:

East-Asian: Fishers' Exact Significance = 0.023\*, df = 1, p < .05

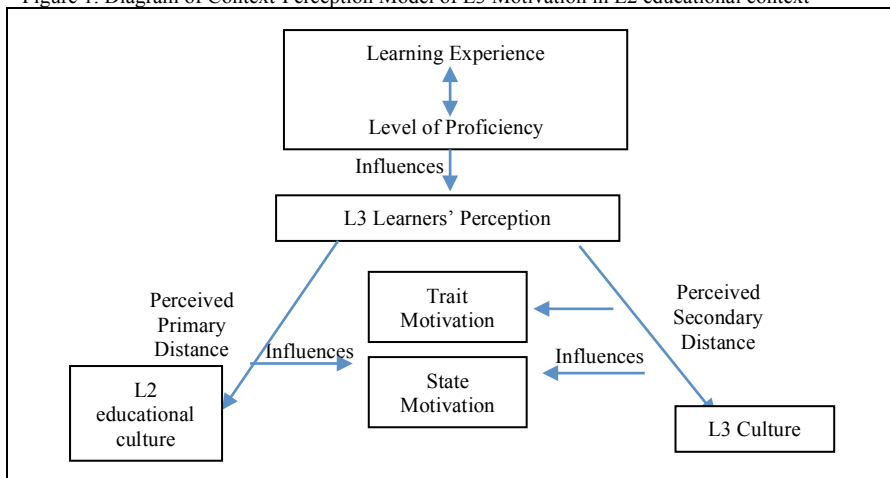
Western: Fisher's Exact Significance = 0.197, df = 1, ns

Matsumoto (2009) claimed that similar to the results of the study by Wen (1997), the Asian background students had expected the study of Japanese to be relatively easy for them because of the cultural (and in some aspects, linguistic) similarities to Japanese. These studies indicate that if L2 learners perceive the target culture very close to their own, they may incorrectly underestimate the actual strain of the L2 learning, which then demotivates the learners and may

end their learning. Given this, the cultural distance should not be regarded as a factor systematically working on every L2 learner to enhance or diminish his or her motivation. The distance may be a vague and abstract concept that each individual L2 learner subjectively perceives. Depending on their personal perceptions, the distance could affect various subsets of motivation, such as self-efficacy and attitudes towards target language and culture, in complex ways.

In the ordinary foreign language learning context as discussed above, two cultures, learners' L1 and L2, are involved, but there is also another discrete situation in a foreign language learning context. At universities in Australia, for example, there are international students who study foreign languages, not English, as L3. As mentioned above, Matsumoto's (2009) study included Asian students from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea learning Japanese as L3 at universities in Australia. In this case, there are three different cultures involved in the learning context for each learner; his or her own, Japanese as a target L3 culture, and the culture of the Australian educational (L2) context. Therefore, the cultural distance has dual directions; learners' own to target language and also to the educational culture. The learners who perceive the target L3 culture close to their own may view the actual learning context distant from their own educational culture. In the discussion of the L3 as a foreign language learners' motivation in an L2 educational context, these dual directions as the cultural distance may need to be taken into consideration because the globalization of tertiary institutions has been accelerated in the recent years and the increase of the number of international students has become more prominent in many countries. The actual relationship among the factors in the model; level of L3 proficiency which is mutually related to learning experience, learners' perception, perceived distance to L3 culture and to L2 educational culture, and trait motivation and state motivation is visually shown as a diagram in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Diagram of Context-Perception Model of L3 Motivation in L2 educational context



Another point to be taken into account is learners' level of proficiency in foreign language learning. Matsumoto's study in 2009 found different motivational traits among the students from the same East-Asian backgrounds. Although the elementary level students weakened their motivation and intended to terminate their learning, their intermediate level counterparts did not show the same motivational predispositions and intentions to drop out. This could be interpreted that the students with a higher level of proficiency were those who had more experiences in learning the language in the Australian (i.e. foreign) educational context. They had experienced the Australian methods of assessment and course requirements which should be quite different from their learning experiences in their own countries, as Caiger et al. (1996) noted. With more learning experience, learners with a higher level of proficiency tend to have different motivational traits, because "motivation seems to be shaped by different temporal frames of references, with the majority ascribing their motivation predominantly to the impact of language learning experience to date" (Ushioda, 2001, p. 107).

The above discussions have led to the development of the present motivational model that includes three related elements: 1) dual cultural distances from learners' L1 to the L2 educational context and to L3 as the target foreign language; 2) learners' L1 as the basis for their perceptions of the cultural distances; and 3) levels of proficiency as the developmental steps and the degrees of integration into the educational context to perceive the distances. These three are regarded as particular factors that affect L3 learners' motivation in a specific learning context of foreign language learning where international university students learn a foreign language as L3 in Australia either as their major or an elective subject. From this perspective of the discussion of L3 motivation, the Context-Perception Model was developed, taking three different cultures into the L3 learning context, and three inter-related elements that work for the L3 learners' motivational force. The next section will discuss the relevance of the three elements, particularly in the Australian educational context of foreign L3 acquisition.

### **3.2. Dual-Distance Hypothesis**

The discussion in the previous section about the cultural distance introduced that the cultural distance could be dual directional when international students learning L3 in an L2 educational context. The primary distance between the learners' own and target language may affect them either positively or negatively. The general contention based on a number of studies such as Svanes (1987), Schumann (1986), and Chizwick & Miller (2005) is that the smaller the distance may be, the acquisition of the target language should be more successful. However, Wen (1997) and Matsumoto (2009) found a smaller distance could develop the learners' unrealistic expectations of easiness in acquiring the language. Their level of self-efficacy could be raised much higher than their actual capability in learning the language due to the general perceptions of the similarities between the two cultures and some linguistic similarities. This primary cultural distance may be a macro-factor that affects



learners' general trait-motivation. So, regardless of particular individual variables, learners with the same cultural background may be more likely to possess these tendencies when the two cultures are seen to have a number of similar and shared aspects.

The secondary distance between the learners' own and that of the educational context should usually have a more negative effect if the distance is larger. In other words, the secondary distance works only negatively to demotivate L2 learners when there is a large distance. This secondary distance is relevant only in the classroom context where "motivation can be seen as a continuous interaction process between the learner and the environment" (Julkenen, 2001, p. 29). In a study contrasting that which investigated students with relatively closer backgrounds of the educational culture to Australia, Matsumoto (2012) examined 140 university students in Australia learning English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese in 12-week courses to find the influence of learning experience on their motivation and the students' perceptions of factors that affected their motivation, and how the students' cultural backgrounds interrelate to the perceptions. He divided the students into four regions: Europe and North America, North East Asia, Australia and new Zealand, and other regions, then conducted a questionnaire survey at the beginning and the end of the course. The study found that East-Asian students, including China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan showed different motivational predispositions. See the duplicated table from Matsumoto (2012, p. 6) below.

Table 2. Motivational intensity at the beginning & the end of semester and between groups comparisons (ANOVA)

Region					Paired Samples T-test	
		Beginning	End	Difference	t	Sig.
EUA	Mean	5.29	5.43	+0.14	-1.537	.134
	N	35	35	0		
	Std. Deviation	0.86	0.98	+0.12		
NEA	Mean	4.61	4.66	+0.05	-.349	.729
	N	38	38	0		
	Std. Deviation	0.89	0.88	-0.01		
ANZ	Mean	5.53	5.00	-0.53	3.614	**.001
	N	51	51	0		
	Std. Deviation	0.83	1.25	+0.42		
RST	Mean	5.13	5.25	+0.12	-.620	.544
	N	16	16	0		
	Std. Deviation	1.09	1.18	+0.09		
Total	Mean	5.17	5.04	-0.13	1.639	.103
	N	140	140	0		
	Std. Deviation	0.95	1.11	+0.16		
ANOVA	F	8.163	3.289	5.161		
	Sig.	** .000	* .023	** .002		

Maximum  $M = 7.00$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

EUA = Europe & North America, NEA = North East Asia, ANZ = Australia & New Zealand, RST = Rest of the world

They had the lowest level of motivational intensity compared to Australian and New Zealander students, and students from Europe and North America. In addition, they indicated “teachers’ personality” and “peer performance” as the most strongly influencing variables on their motivation, and the result was significantly different from the learners with other Western cultural and educational backgrounds. See a partially duplicated table from Matsumoto (2012, p. 9) below.

Table 3. Between group comparisons &amp; repeated measures of motivational affecting factors

			EUA	NEA	ANZ	RST	ANOVA <i>F</i>	Sig.
<i>N</i>			35	38	51	16		
Teacher	Begin	Mean	4.26	3.89	4.27	4.06	2.547	.059
		SD	0.70	0.56	0.83	0.57		
Personality	End	Mean	4.26	4.11	4.39	4.00	1.855	.140
		SD	0.78	0.69	0.64	0.82		
Difference Paired Sample			0	+0.22	+0.12	-0.06	<b>3.124</b>	<b>*.028</b>
			T-test Sig.	1.000	.173	.293	.751	
Peer	Begin	Mean	3.35	3.76	3.31	3.75	2.327	.077
		SD	1.01	1.00	0.91	0.68		
Performance	End	Mean	<b>3.41</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>4.295</b>	<b>** .006</b>
		SD	0.91	0.72	1.04	1.01		
Difference Paired Sample			+0.06	+0.27	+0.06	-0.06	<b>4.431</b>	<b>** .005</b>
			T-test Sig.	.721	.151	.659	.835	

Maximum  $M = 5.00$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Matsumoto (2012) claimed that “Asian students may perceive their teachers and peer learners behaving differently from those in their own educational contexts in their countries” (P. 10). He (2012) continued “due to the different style of teaching and learning in a foreign environment, Asian students may be more likely to perceive their teachers and classmates as factors strongly influencing their motivation to study in the classroom” (p. 10). The motivation affected and shaped by the classroom learning experience may therefore be a situation-specific motivation, namely state-motivation that works as a situation-specific action tendency as Julkunen (2001) has stated. Therefore, as the learners spend more time in the classroom in their given courses, their motivational tendencies may change consistently and only those who successfully manage to adjust to the given teaching/learning style may enhance their state-motivation and thus be able to survive through to the next stage of language courses.

Based on the above discussion, the dual cultural distance could be considered a negative factor that affects L2 learners who have similar L1 and L2 cultures as the primary distance and a very different educational culture from the learning environment as the secondary distance. The primary distance influences the learners as trait-motivation, such that it develops a general predisposition for them to underestimate the amount of work required to learn the target language, while the secondary distance demotivates the learners as state-motivation at each moment in the learning context in the classroom at the initial stage the foreign language course. However, depending on each learner’s individual variables, including personality, prior learning experiences, and attitudes towards the

study, some learners may be able to overcome such a motivational adversity. This claim, however, may be valid only in some contexts, such as in the Australian context with Asian-background learners learning foreign third languages. Other learning contexts with learners from different cultural backgrounds may not fall into this frame because, depending on the different cultural backgrounds, learners seem to attribute their failure (and success) to different aspects of language learning, as Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna (2001) have suggested. This should be addressed as a research agenda in the future study.

### 3.3. Culture-Based Perception Hypothesis

L2 learners are exposed to various learning events continuously through the long process of L2 learning. Especially in the L3 as a foreign language in L2 educational learning environment as proposed in this model, those events should be unpredictably different from what the learners have experienced in their own educational environment in their own countries. Whatever the learners experience in the classroom should be regarded as a factor affecting their state-motivation for learning the language in the classroom. The learning experience, then, is always perceived by each learner and the perception entails a resultant motivational state. The way learners perceive the environmental factors in their experiences, however, should relate to how the learner's culture views the environmental factors. Matsumoto (2009) found that East-Asian background students showed weaker levels of interest in Japanese culture compared to those students with Western background. Because of the close cultural relationship between the students and the target language, East-Asian background students seemed to have perceived the Japanese culture more familiar and less interesting compared to the Western-background students who had little overlap between their own cultures and Japanese culture, and this stimulated their cultural interest. See the partially duplicated tables from Matsumoto (2009, 10.11, 10.13) below.

Table 3. Inter-cultural comparison of interest in cultural aspects at the beginning of the course (QB)

Intention in QB	Level	Cultural Background		Cultural Aspect of Japan				
				Culture	Society	People	Language	Business
Continue	Elementary	East-Asian	Mean	2.85	2.48	2.70	3.40	2.35
			S.D.	.813	1.230	1.081	.598	1.268
		Western	Mean	3.12	2.88	3.12	3.59	2.41
			S.D.	.485	.928	.485	.618	1.326
Intermediate		East-Asian	Mean	3.06	2.56	3.13	3.44	2.88
			S.D.	.929	1.365	.500	.629	.885
		Western	Mean	3.46	2.86	3.46	3.64	2.46
			S.D.	.576	.809	.508	.488	1.201

S.D. = Standard Deviation

Wilcoxon W: Significant results only (Discontinuing students are excluded due to the small number)

Intermediate: "People"  $z = 1.997^*$ ,  $N = 44$ ,  $p, .05$

Table 4. Inter-cultural comparison of interest in cultural aspects at the end of the course (QE)

Intention in QB	Level	Cultural Background		Culture	Cultural Aspect of Japan			
					Society	People	Language	Business
Continue	Elementary	East-Asian	Mean	3.20	2.33	3.07	3.27	1.33
			S.D.	.561	1.345	.961	1.033	1.718
		Western	Mean	3.33	3.00	3.20	3.33	2.53
			S.D.	.488	1.000	.561	.817	1.187
	Intermediate	East-Asian	Mean	3.06	2.38	3.00	3.25	1.81
			S.D.	.929	1.204	.894	1.065	1.328
		Western	Mean	3.27	3.04	3.26	3.30	1.89
			S.D.	.839	.706	.813	.823	1.553

S.D. = Standard Deviation

Wicoxon W: Significant results only (Discontinuing students excluded due to a small number)

Intermediate: "Society"  $z = -2.459^*$ ,  $N = 43$ ,  $p < .05$

Matsumoto's (2012) study also found that East-Asian background students perceived classroom motivational factors significantly differently from Western background students. They perceived "teachers' personality" and "peer performances" as factors much more importantly affected their motivation compared to the Western-background counterparts as discussed in the previous section. Though not statistically significant, the Asian students came to rank "self-performance" less importantly in affecting their motivation compared to the Western-background students, after they had experienced the study in the courses. Generally speaking, Asian countries are more likely to regard a harmonious society highly. That means they tend to have a primary interest in society's common benefit, rather than an individual's personal advantage. Western societies, on the other hand, tend to attach more value to the individualism. People in a harmonious society are likely to be homogeneous, and thus to pay more attention on what other people say, think and do. Therefore, Asian students may perceive what their teachers' attitudes towards them, how the teachers talk to them, and how their classmates interact with them during the class tasks and activities as more importantly affecting their motivation. The cultural backgrounds of L2 learners thus seem to affect their perceptions of various variables that are included in the learning environment. Motivation may be viewed as "the on-going process of how the learner thinks about and interprets events in relevant L2-learning and L2-related experience and how such cognitions and beliefs then shape subsequent involvement in learning" (Ushioda, 2001, p. 122). How the learners perceive their own L2 learning in a particular learning environment may be one of the most important determinants of their consequent motivational state and as a result, learning performance, and their perceptions are strongly affected by their cultural backgrounds.

### 3.4. Proficiency-Learning Experience Hypothesis

As discussed above, L2 learners' motivation is influenced by their perceptions of various environmental factors, and how the learners perceive the dual cultural distance can affect their trait and state motivations. Their perceptions of the cultural distance are strongly affected by their L1 culture. At the same time, the learners' perceptions of the learning events seem to be affected also by their learning experiences. In other words, learners who have been learning the

language longer may perceive the same learning events differently from the learners with little experience. The longer and more learning experiences the learners may have, the more proficient they could be. That is, learners' level of proficiency may be another factor affecting their perceptions of learning events, and therefore their motivation.

Matsumoto (2009) found that among East-Asian background students learning Japanese showed different motivational predispositions according to their level of study at the universities in Australia. The students at the elementary level were least interested in Japanese culture among other three groups, East-Asian intermediate level students and Western-background students at the two levels. However, East-Asian elementary level students developed their cultural interest in Japanese more than other groups after they had learned Japanese, as shown in Table 3 and 4. Matsumoto's (2011) study on the classroom factors affecting their motivation also found that the level of proficiency had a significant influence on the learners' perceptions of factors affecting their motivation for learning L2s. He investigated 119 international students studying English in a language school attached to a university in Australia in order to detect how various teacher factors affect students' motivation, and how their levels of proficiency are interrelated with their perceptions. See the duplicated table from Matsumoto (2011, p. 45) below. Eight out of 119 did not indicate teacher as a factor that affected their motivation, and so were excluded from this analysis.

Table 5 Students' perception of most affecting teacher factor for their own motivation

Proficiency level		Teacher factors			Total
		Personality	Behaviour	Teaching	
Elementary	Count	9	4	1	14
	%	64.3%	28.6%	7.1%	100%
Intermediate	Count	7	9	26	42
	%	16.7%	21.4%	61.9%	100%
Advanced	Count	6	8	41	55
	%	10.9%	14.5%	74.5%	100%
Total	Count	22	21	68	111
	%	19.8%	18.9%	61.3%	100%

Chi-Square test:  $\chi^2 = 26.046$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .001$

These results indicated that L2 learners' level of proficiency seems to be a factor that affects motivation. But why does the level of proficiency become a factor that influences each L2 learner's motivation? L2 acquisition is a process that takes fairly long time (e.g. months to years) before the learners reach a minimum level of proficiency that enables them to communicate in the target language. During this process, the learners' motivation continuously changes its intensity and functions due to the learners' interactions with various internal and external factors as Dörnyei (2000) has claimed in his Process Model. L2 learners persist in their L2 learning because that is only the way they can acquire proficiency and gradually achieve a better and higher skills and knowledge of L2. That is, the proficiency levels are the representation of their continuing learning experiences.

At each phase of L2 learning in that long process, the learners perceive the occurrence of L2 learning events in and out of the classroom; reflecting on their previous learning experience and their cultural/educational backgrounds, they may attribute the events to their internal or external, or stable or unstable aspects (Weiner, 1986). The higher levels of proficiency, therefore, allow learners have naturally more learning experience. In the particular learning context, such as learning L3 in L2 educational background, the learners with higher levels of proficiency can be regarded as having successfully integrated into the L3 learning within L2 educational (i.e. Australian) context, and having developed a better way to cope with the given educational context which was also foreign to them. In other words, learners with higher proficiency in this context have narrowed the distance to the educational culture, and may be able to reduce the negative impact of the learning events on their trait-motivation to continue their learning. That appears to be why the intermediate level of East-Asian students in Matsumoto's (2009) study showed higher levels of intention to continue their Japanese language study than their elementary level counterparts. The ways in which L3 learners perceive learning events vary, but are affected by their cultural/educational background. If the distance is wide, then they are more likely to be affected negatively by the distance. However, the distance can be narrowed as they experience learning and reduce the secondary cultural gap. Among learners with the same cultural background, some can do this, but others cannot. This seems to be supported by Dornyei's (2009) "ideal self" in the L2 motivational self-system. Those who have an "ideal self" image that needs to be identified as the future real self can be integratively motivated to narrow the gap and learn the L2 successfully. This ideal self could be identified not only referring to target language but also to L2 learning educational context. This hypothesis should be empirically verified in the future studies.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper has presented Context-Perception Model of motivation, which focuses on three factors: dual-cultural distance, L2 learners' perceptions of learning events, and their proficiency levels as a reflection of learning experiences. This model is based on a particular learning context of Australia where learners learn their L3 as a foreign language in a formal context. Cultural distance in conventional studies has been regarded only as a positive factor in a linear fashion as the distance is smaller, but the present paper has discussed how cultural distance works in more complex ways and how educational distance may be regarded equally strongly as affecting learners' motivational state. The distances can be narrowed or further broaden depending on the learners' perception of events, and the perception is strongly affected by their cultural background. Influenced by a particular cultural background, learners may be more likely to perceive learning events in some predictable ways. Levels of proficiency may also be regarded as a factor affecting motivation. Learners' proficiency can be regarded as the representation of learning experiences. Thus, the more experience the learners may have in a given learning context, the more chance they have to narrow the gap between the educational culture distances.

This may lead to better chances to survive through to the higher levels of study in the given learning environment. This model has been developed based only on limited studies conducted in the Australian context, and definitely needs further study to verify its validity and necessary development through extended discussions. Further research should contribute to the development of framework of the study of L2 motivation in similar learning context because international exchange of students has been more common than ever, and these students may face additional motivational burden in learning a third language in a foreign educational context.

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