

Key Motivational Factors and How Teachers Can Encourage Motivation in their Students

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What are the key factors that motivate someone to learn a foreign language?
To what extent can we, as teachers or language advisors improve levels of motivation in our students?

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1. INTRODUCTION

The question on many language teachers' minds is why are there some students who want to learn while others show no inclination whatsoever. For the last 50 years, linguists have been trying to answer this question by determining what motivational factors encourage an individual to learn a foreign language. Motivation apparently is a vital component to learn an L2 and some consider it one of the most essential factors for learning a foreign language. "Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals" (Dornyei, 1998:117). Therefore, the question has moved from whether motivation is a key factor for learning a foreign language to what creates motivation and how teachers can nurture it in their students and classrooms.

In this paper, I will be examining some of the main ideas that have been researched and argued in the field of motivation, the current views of motivational factors that contribute to learning a foreign language and how these ideas have common characteristics. Finally, through such factors, I will talk about the teacher's role in implementing motivation is and what teachers can do to improve levels of motivation in their students. I will be concentrating on the English language as it has such a unique position in the world today.

1.1 DEVELOPMENT OF MOTIVATIONAL RESEARCH

Throughout the last 50 years there have been three major stages of motivational research. Dornyei categorizes them as The Social Psychological period (1959 – 1990), where the idea of integrative and instrumental motivation was labeled. The Cognitive-Situated period (during the 1990s), in which self-determination and self-confidence were introduced, and New Approaches (past decade), that examines the idea of “possible selves” (2009:16 – 17).

The Social Psychological period was engulfed by the early work of Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1959, 1972 in Clement *et al.*, 1994), who proposed a broad classification of motivational factors into two categories, integrative and instrumental. In the late 80s/early 90s two new ideas were introduced and explored, Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Approach (1985, in Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, in addition to Richard Clement’s model of Linguistic Self-Confidence (1978, in Clement *et al.*, 1994). Most recently, Zoltan Dornyei has proposed the L2 Motivational Self System, which “[interprets] *Integrativeness* in a broader sense than has been done before” (Csizer and Dornyei, 2005:29). Dornyei links motivation with the ‘possible selves,’ which represent what a student imagines themselves to be in the future (2009:17). The frequent changes of perspectives and the wide expansion of research in this field suggest that motivational factors to learn a foreign language have been considered a vital importance in learning an L2.

2. GARDNER'S SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

One of the first teams to explore motivation in the language-learning classroom was Gardner and Lambert (1959). Their view of motivation argued that,

...an individual's motivation to learn an L2 is sustained by both attitudes toward the L2 community and the goals, or orientations, sought through the acquisition of the L2 (1972, in Noels *et al.*, 2003:36).

Gardner and Lambert's theory argues that motivation to learn an L2 requires a positive attitude towards the L2 community and a desire to become a member of that community (Clement *et al.*, 1994:419). Through this idea, they introduced two kinds of motivation, integrative and instrumental (1959). Dornyei characterizes the former as having a positive attitude toward the L2 society and "...the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community" (1994a:274). For example, a person who wants to live in an L2 country and become a part of that society would possess integrative motivation to learn the L2. Gardner and Lambert describe instrumental motivation as the desire to gain practical benefits (1972 in Clement *et al.*, 1994:419). For instance, a person who wants to learn an L2 to better their future career with more job prospects and a higher salary would have instrumental motivation.

Through their study, Gardner and Lambert conclude that integratively motivated students are more successful at learning an L2 than instrumentally motivated students. According to them, "...students with the integrative orientation have more favourable attitudes towards members of the French group and are more strongly motivated to acquire their language" (1959:271). Students with positive attitudes towards the L2 community are

more inclined to learn such language, therefore proving the applicability of Gardner and Lambert's integrative motivation theory to Canadian students learning French.

The strength of Gardner and Lambert's theory is that it was empirically tested and supported by strong evidence. Although their research cannot be disputed, linguists have found some limitations with the findings.

2.1 RESTRICTIONS WITH GARDNER'S THEORY

There have been some uncertainties concerning Gardner and Lambert's research findings since first being published. Even though it was empirically evident, the main hindrance with the theory is that the research was only tested on second language learners. There is an important difference to note between learning a second language and learning a foreign language, (hereafter referred to as SL and FL). Learning an SL involves having some contact with the L2 community, whereas learning an FL, students have less exposure to L2 speakers (Dornyei, 1994b:520). Gardner and Lambert's conclusion is solely based on a specific group of subjects who were learning an L2 in an SL setting. For this reason, their theory might not be applicable to FL learners.

2.1.1 FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

For FL learners, especially those who live in a unilingual country, opportunities to have contact with members of the L2 community can be rare. According to Dornyei, because of this lack of contact, FL students do not have experience with the L2 community and cannot form attitudes about such group, thus causing a lack of desire to integrate into that

society (1990 in Warden and Lin, 2008:538). This can be seen in learners of English in relatively insular countries like China (Liu, 2007) and Korea (Pae, 2008). These students have limited exposure to native English speakers, therefore may not want to integrate or identify themselves with an English speaking society. In FL learning environments, where there can be minimal contact with the L2 community, integrative motivation, as conceived by Gardner and Lambert (1959), might have little relevance to determine the success in learning an L2.

2.1.2 ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

One of the most pronounced changes in learning English is that it has become a global language. Kormos and Csizer argue that when it comes to learning English, there is no specific community to associate with (2008:331). English has become such a global language that for most EFL learners, the motivation to study English is the desire to communicate with other nonnative speakers, not just a set community. Kormos and Csizer argue that,

The main reason for problems with integrativeness is that in the 21st century a high number of students learn an L2 in a foreign language setting with the purpose of being able to communicate with other nonnative speakers in an international environment (2008:330).

Learning English has been transformed into not only being able to communicating with native speakers, but also with other nonnative speakers outside of English speaking countries. Due to the change in global languages, there is no model community to identify with, consequently leading to a broader classification of integrative motivation.

An individual may want to integrate into the global society of both native and nonnative English speakers. In this case, it might be difficult to distinguish integrative from instrumental motivation. For instance, someone who wants to get a better job (a classic instrumental orientation), would also enable him or her to integrate into the English speaking global community. Kormos and Csizer argue that,

...as a consequence of English becoming a world language, the pragmatic benefits deriving from being able to speak this language and the attitudes to the 'World (*sic*) English community have become intricately linked, which has rendered the separation of integrativeness and instrumentality problematic (2008:331).

2.1.3 THE NEED FOR INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATION

Even though Gardner and Lambert (1959) claim that integrative motivated students are more successful in learning an L2 than instrumental motivated students, this conclusion has little relevance in today's FL classrooms. FL learners might not be exposed to native English speakers or the L2 on a regular basis, however there is an understanding that studying English could possibly lead to an improvement in future careers (Warden and Lin, 2008). A study of Chinese students learning English concludes that, "...integrative motivation is not as important to these students as...instrumental motivation (ibid:542). Students who live thousands of miles away from the closest L2 community may not be motivated to integrate into that society, nonetheless do possess instrumental motivation to learn that language to promote a career and or gain a higher salary.

On the other hand, Dornyei (1990 in Dornyei, 2003) believes that one can still be integratively motivated without having contact with the L2 community. He argues that, for FL learners, where there is no direct contact with the L2 and the language is mostly

learned as a school subject, one can still be in some ways integratively motivated. Instead of identifying and having attitudes towards the L2 community through actual contact, "...the identification can be generalized to the cultural and intellectual values associated with the language, as well as to the actual L2 itself" (Dornyei, 1990 in Dornyei, 2003:6). An individual may not necessarily want to integrate or become a valued member of that society as Gardner and Lambert define, yet wants to gain a better understanding of how the L2 community views the world.

3. INTRINSIC VS. EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were originally used to research what causes motivation in a variety of contexts. Recently it has been expanded to research the effective causes of motivation that produce success in L2 learning (Noels *et al.*, 2003).

3.1 INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Intrinsic motivation is an important factor when considering language learning. Wu describes the characteristics as an individual being motivated to act on an activity for the pure joy that accompanies such activity without any external factors or motives (2003:502). For example, a student who completes an activity for his or her own enjoyment without pressure from outside sources to participate in the task could be considered to have intrinsic motivation. Language learners who possess intrinsic motivation are motivated because of the enjoyment of gaining competence and the pleasure that the activities can have producing new language.

3.1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

The positive characteristics intrinsic motivation has to search for answers and study for one's own sake are significant factors to be a successful language learner. For students who possess this quality, there seems to be a chance to achieve autonomy and competence, as well as full-fill long-term goals. This is discussed in Ramage's study, which concluded that students who are motivated to learn an L2 for their own sake are more likely to continue with language studies in the future (1990, in Noels *et al.*, 1999:25). Thus, students with more intrinsic motivation have a higher chance of continuing their studies and furthering their L2 competence.

3.2 EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

On the contrary, extrinsic motivation refers to the motivation one has to participate in an activity not for the joy of it, but to accomplish some external goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Noels *et al.*, 1999; Noels *et al.*, 2003; Dornyei, 1998). For instance, an individual who participates in an activity to receive praise, money, or a reward, as well as avoiding punishment from an external figure is characterized as possessing extrinsic motivation.

3.1.2 LIMITATIONS

Extrinsic motivation does have short-term motivational characteristics. However, students with it do not necessarily have positive attitudes about the L2, and research shows that such students could be more likely to discontinue language studies. Ramage's study argues that students who took the language to fulfill an academic requirement are more likely to cease any future language learning classes (1990, in Noels *et al.*, 1999:25).

If the motivation to learn an L2 is to pass a class or receive an academic credit, then once completing this goal, there may be no point for an individual to continue studying after receiving their mark.

In a school setting, Dornyei argues that students could lose their intrinsic interest if they have to meet extrinsic requirements (1994a:276). For example, required reading at school or mandatory language classes could cause loss of intrinsic motivation. According to Brown, “In a language course, extrinsic pressures are most often manifested in foreign language requirements set by the institution and in established standardized test scores that must be achieved” (2007:181). In this type of L2 learning environment having these extrinsic pressures, I cannot blame them for losing intrinsic motivation. Many external pressures seem to prevent any enjoyment in the classroom, which is the primary factor of intrinsic motivation.

4. LINGUISTIC SELF-CONFIDENCE

Richard Clement *et al.* first introduced linguistic self-confidence as a motivational factor in the L2 classroom (1977 in Dornyei, 1998,123). Clement originally argued that in

...multicultural contexts, where direct contact with the L2 is available, positive attitudes toward an L2 would promote interactions with the L2 speakers, which in turn develop an independent motivational process identified as self-confidence (1980 in Pae, 2008:11).

Therefore, in an SL setting, an individual’s attitude and effort to learn and speak to L2 members would result in L2 success. Clement and Kruidenier argue that self-confidence is the most significant determining factor of motivation to learn an SL (1985:24).

Clement and Kruidenier's study of French speaking Canadians concluded that, "Contact with members of the second language group not only determines level of proficiency but also the pertinence and operation of the self-confidence process" (1985:34). Thus, according to them, having contact with the L2 community is an important aspect of developing competence and self-confidence in the language.

4.1 SELF-CONFIDENCE IN A UNICULTURAL SETTING

Originally linguistic self-confidence was regarded as a motivational factor in a multicultural setting, however Clement *et al.* (1994) later expanded this theory to be applicable in unicultural settings as well. Clement's *et al.* (1994) study of Hungarian students proved that self-confidence could be a motivational factor in the FL classroom as well. Even though these students did not have any direct contact with the L2 language, they did have "considerable indirect contact with the L2 culture through the media..." (Dornyei, 1998:123).

This study provides empirical evidence that even though FL learners do not have direct contact with the L2, they can also possess linguistic self-confidence. Having self-confidence, as stated above, whether it comes from direct or indirect contact with the L2 community, has been proven as a successful motivational factor in learning the L2.

5. L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF-SYSTEM

Markus and Nurius explored the original motivational concept of "possible selves." This theory of "possible selves" is "...the individuals' ideas of what they *might* become, what

they *would like to* become, and what they are *afraid of* becoming,” (1986, in Dornyei, 2009:17). Therefore, the “possible selves” provide motivation to become who a person imagines himself or herself being in the future. Imagery is an important aspect of this theory because if one can positively envision their possible self, this can then be used as motivation in realistic situations (Dornyei, 2009:17).

Dornyei (2005, in Dornyei, 2009) explores this concept and introduces it into the foreign language setting consisting of three elements of “possible selves.” The first being the *ideal self*, which represents what characteristics an individual would like to have and the person he or she would like to become. Next is the *ought-to self* that represents what qualities an individual believes they should possess, which could include social obligations, responsibilities, or morals. Lastly, the *L2 learning experience* that relates to the learning environment and experience that an individual is engaged in (Dornyei, 2009).

This theory suggests that a combination of the individual’s vision of himself or herself as an L2 speaker, the social pressures derived from outside sources, and a positive environment will lead to motivation to learn an L2. However, there is no empirical evidence that proves this model successful, thus only being a hypothesis.

6. KEY FACTORS

Looking back on these theories one can distinguish connections and similarities between them. Throughout the research over the last 50 years, common themes and ideas have

consistently emerged suggesting that in many cases the different theories are in fact just other ways of looking at the same underlying phenomenon.

6.1 POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE L2 COMMUNITY

Firstly, there appears to be a mutual agreement that the attitude towards the L2 community has some importance in succeeding in learning the L2. Gardner and Lambert, as well as Clement (1980 in Pae, 2008:11) believe that to learn an L2, one must have an attitude towards that society. Correspondingly, as discussed earlier, Gardner and Lambert (1959) proposed the idea that motivation to learn an L2 was dependent on the attitude toward the L2 community and wanting to become a member of that society. These ideas seem to correspond with the idea that motivation to successfully acquire an L2 relies on the attitudes towards such community.

6.2 THE ENJOYMENT OF LEARNING

Secondly, there seems to be a common factor in that to be motivated, the students must enjoy learning the L2. Intrinsically motivated students, who, as stated above, are more likely to continue their studies than extrinsically motivated students and simply partake in an activity for the pure pleasure of learning the language (Wu, 2003:502). Similarly, integratively motivated students enjoy learning the language and culture of that society. There must be some sort of enjoyment while learning in order to be motivated to continue studying the L2.

6.3 IDEAL SELF

Thirdly, in Dornyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005, in Dornyei, 2009), the *ideal self*, which represents what an individual would like to become, brings together elements of both the instrumental and integrative sides of Gardner and Lambert's theory. An individual's image of their future self will involve instrumental qualities such as employment and lifestyle, and integrative qualities such as wishing to be a sophisticated, well educated, and globally aware person.

6.4 EXTERNAL PRESSURES

Lastly, it would appear that there is a factor of outside pressure that motivates one to learn an L2. Whether it is to please parents, receive a reward, or fulfill some pragmatic goal, the student is motivated to satisfy some external pressure. Noels *et al.* link extrinsic and instrumental motivation by suggesting that they both,

...[refer] to the desire to [learn] a second/foreign language because of some pressure or reward from the social environment (such as career advancement or a course credit), internalized reasons for learning an L2 (such as guilt or shame), and/or personal decisions to do so and its value for the chosen goals (2001, in Liu, 2007:128).

This also links to Dornyei's idea of the *ought-to self* where there are external pressures of what an individual should become. These external, short-term goals could be detrimental to furthering language learning seeing as though an individual is only studying to satisfy some outside source.

This comparative analysis has produced four key factors of motivation. Firstly, a positive attitude towards the L2 community. Secondly, a real enjoyment of language learning.

Thirdly, a desire for self-improvement and a clear image of one's future self. The fourth is a negative aspect where external pressures are the cause of a loss of motivation. The issue now seems to be how we as teachers can encourage in our students the first three factors and guard against the fourth.

7. TEACHER'S ROLE AS A FACILITATOR OF MOTIVATION

I believe, especially for young learners, a parental figure can be a major factor of whether or not a student is motivated to learn an L2. Parents have the power to instill in their children a positive future self-image, set examples for their children to have a positive attitude towards the L2 community, and not apply excessive external pressure on their children. However, this is not always the case and teachers must do this instead. At any rate, teachers must be in charge of the second key factor in encouraging enjoyment in learning the language.

Learning an L2 is often different than learning another school subject. For instance, in an FL environment parents may be less likely to speak the L2. Therefore, the parents might not be able to help the student with his or her homework, which could cause a lack of involvement in the language by the parent, and may lead to low motivation from the student.

I see this in my Korean students where because their parents speak very little English or not at all, consequently many students do not think that studying English is as important as studying other subjects, thus leading to a lack of motivation to learn English. This

suggests that I have to be the one to encourage motivation in my students. Pae supports this by pointing out that, in Korea because of the lack of contact with native speakers and that English is learned as a school subject, "...it is natural that the English instructor should play a more active role in promoting...motivation" (2008:23). Therefore, in this context, I believe that the language teacher has the main responsibility to improve the levels of motivation in a student and in the language classroom.

8. IMPROVING MOTIVATION

8.1 SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE

The teacher must set a good example in their actions for students to have a positive attitude towards the L2 culture. For native-speaking teachers, it may be natural to have enthusiasm about their culture. Yet, it must be remembered that native teachers must encourage a positive attitude in their students, not force one. Native teachers can do this by building a good relationship with students, as well as being friendly, helpful, and enthusiastic in class.

For non-native speakers, their roles might be slightly different. These teachers must maintain a positive outlook toward the L2 community setting a good example for their students. Non-native teachers can do this by showing interest and enthusiasm about the L2 community and sharing positive, personal experiences that they have had with the L2 community.

8.1.1 FAMILIAR WITH L2 CULTURE

Students need to be familiar with the L2 culture in order to have a positive outlook. For English this 'L2 culture' has turned into a global community. So rather than familiarizing students with just traditional native-speaking countries, teachers can promote a general cross-cultural awareness. According to Dornyei, teachers should focus on cross-cultural similarities not just differences to encourage positive attitudes (1994a:281). This suggests that the L2 community is not as foreign as one might think.

Another idea is to invite native and non-native speakers of English to class and talk about their culture and how they use English in their daily lives. Having unique people come and talk to the class in person can encourage interest in the culture and a desire to want to learn more.

Also, decorating the classroom with L2 paraphernalia and exposing students to authentic L2 materials can encourage a positive attitude as well. Being surrounded by the L2 will make the students feel that the culture is less foreign and can bring about enthusiasm in the students. Such approaches can put positive attitudes in the students' minds about this global community they can be a part of.

8.2 RELATIVE TO STUDENTS' INTERESTS

To be motivated it is crucial that the students enjoy learning the L2. Teachers have the most influence in this. Classes should be interesting and teachers can do this by creating materials that are relevant to the students' interests. With these interests in mind,

teachers can make games and activities that the students find challenging, yet enjoyable. Using materials and participating in activities that are relevant to their interests will bring about more enjoyment in the classroom and a greater motivation to learn the L2.

8.3 POSITIVE IMAGE OF *IDEAL SELF*

Teachers can help students create a positive image of their *ideal self* in their minds. Teachers and students can talk about where and what kind of person the students see themselves in the future. Then, by working together the teacher and student can set personal goals of how to attain this *ideal self* and make the achievement of these goals realistic. Small steps to reach these goals can show students that learning a language can be possible, as well as helping them manage their progress to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the expansiveness of the L2. Making goals together can increase motivation in students if such goals are believed to be attainable.

8.4 LEARNER AUTONOMY

Teachers must try to steer clear of external pressures by encouraging learner autonomy. Dornyei points out that learner autonomy minimizes external pressures and encourages teamwork between teachers and students in organizing the learning process (1994a:282). Teachers have to put the language learning responsibility into the students' hands so that the students can attribute their successes and failures to their own efforts rather than blaming external factors. To encourage learner autonomy teachers must show students strategies, study habits and create activities that develop analytical abilities.

Despite these approaches that teachers can do to improve motivation, ultimately it lies in students' heads and no two students are completely the same. Therefore, it may not always be possible to motivate all students. In such cases teachers have to do the best they can to work with unmotivated students to achieve learning outcomes. However, this should never discourage teachers from trying to motivate students.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed several different ideas of what causes motivation to learn an L2. Gardner and Lambert's Social Psychological Theory was groundbreaking in that it started a mass wave of research on what motivates individuals to learn an L2. This surge of research developed other ideas, but they all seem to have some aspects in common. By analyzing these common traits, I then found four core factors that influence motivation; a positive attitude towards the L2 community, an enjoyment in learning the language, how students see themselves in the future as language speakers, and what external pressures are hindering their learning.

The language teacher can be an influential source of motivation for L2 learners. Teachers can use these four factors discussed to inspire motivation in their students by familiarizing them with the L2 communities, providing enjoyable lessons that are relevant to the students' needs, creating a positive *ideal self* in their minds, and encouraging language autonomy. These strategies can establish and develop motivation in a student.

Because of the vast differences in learning environments and teaching scenarios, the role of the teacher can be different in each situation. Therefore, the way in which the teacher attempts to motivate students must be formed to fit the needs of their students.

Nevertheless, as Dornyei suggests,

As long as we are aware of the vast repertoire of techniques that are at our disposal, it is up to us to choose the specific ones that we will apply, based on the specific needs that arise in our concrete circumstances (2007,730).

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