

Motivation for a Second or Foreign Language Learning

Zhu Quan

Foreign Language College, Hubei University of Technology, 430074 Wuhan Hubei, China

Abstract. Motivation is a frequently used word both in our daily work and study, which is an important factor which can greatly influence the achievement of learners' second language or foreign language acquisition. Speaking of the history of research on "motivation", Gardner and Lambert and their associates should come first, because they have done the most important work, which made them the most outstanding contributors in this field. There are several kinds of motivation, like instrumental motivation and integrative motivation, and intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and there are some relevant debates between them. Through the current researches on the application of motivation in learning and teaching, we can see how effective the motivational system promoted within cooperative situations is, although there are numbers of different motivational aspects. Maybe more researches should be done, but we can just draw a periodical conclusion that motivation in language learning is a very complicated psychological phenomenon, and it is also the single most influential factor in learning a new language.

Keywords. motivation; second language; learning; teaching.

1 Introduction

Motivation is a frequently used word both in our daily work and study. A teacher might encourage his/her students by saying 'Given motivation, anyone can learn a language'. Thus, it shows in language learning that motivation is very crucial, and actually the same as aptitude, intelligence and attitudes, it is an important factor which can greatly influence the achievement of learners' second language or foreign language acquisition. Skehan (1989) asserts that motivation appears to be the second strongest predictor of success, trailing only aptitude. Then, what is the notion of motivation? In general terms, it refers to the effort which learners put into learning a second or foreign language as a result of their need or desire to learn it.

In recent researches, 'desire to achieve a goal' is usually understood as 'orientations'. Belmechri and Hummel (p 239) in their survey suggest that the prediction of motivation by orientations may be about 2/5 (40%). Therefore it is useful to know about students' orientations. Besides, all studies of motivation as a predictor of success in second or foreign language learning consistently define motivation in relation to attitudinal variables, whether towards the target language, target language speakers and target language community and their interaction with each other. (Lin, p22) It is the reason that case researchers mainly focus on them.

2 The history of research on "motivation"

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 2.0, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Speaking of the researching work on “motivation”, people will naturally think of the most outstanding contributors in this field – Gardner and Lambert and their associates, because they have done the most important work. (Gardner, p 51) In 1980s, Gardner and Lambert started their research. The original theory was an outgrowth of Mowrer’s views (1950) on individual development which emphasize the importance of identification with a valued person. They (1972) suggested that those people who identify positively in this way would like to resemble the foreign peoples concerned, to understand their culture and be able to participate in it. This pattern of motivation they label an integrative orientation. They also described an instrumental orientation to language learning. This type of motivation is based on the advantages that can accrue if a language is known. (Peter Skehan, p53) Their research since then has linked cognitive factors with affective factors, where motivation and attitude are considered to relate directly to both formal and informal language learning. At the same time, other notable related researchers such as Schumann, Giles and Byrne and Krashen have also provided their different models to contend. It is necessary now to have a look at different definitions of motivation developed by many researchers.

3 Definitions of several kinds of motivation and the relevant debate

In Rod Ellis’s *Second Language Acquisition* (p715), he himself having not done any research on motivation, he could not give his own but several researchers are mentioned in the book. Gardner and Lambert come the first because of their influential status or main body of work they have done in this field. They distinguish “instrumental motivation”, which occurs when a learner has a functional goal, such as to get a job, pass an examination, to meet the educational requirement, to use in his/her job, to use on holiday in the country, to read useful material in the target language and exploit members of the foreign culture, etc. (Wilkins, p184) and “integrative motivation”, which occurs when a learner wishes to identify with the culture of L2 group.

H. Douglas Brown in his book – *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (p155) talks of assimilative motivation which is claimed by Graham. Graham thought that integrative motivation had been too broadly defined in previous research. He then made a distinction between integrative and assimilative motivation. Integrative motivation is the desire on the part of a language learner to learn the second language in order to communicate with, or find out about, members of the second language group. Assimilative motivation is the drive to become an indistinguishable member of a speech community, and it usually requires prolonged contact with the second language culture. Assimilative motivation is characteristic of persons who, perhaps at a very young age, learn a second language and second culture in order to identify almost exclusively with that second culture. Thus, seen in this light, one can be integratively oriented without desiring to ‘lose oneself’ in the target culture.

In the same book, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation” was introduced to readers. Edward Deci defined intrinsic motivation:

Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination.

Extrinsically motivated behaviors, on the other hand, are carried out in anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self. Typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades, and even certain types of positive feedback. Behaviors initiated solely to avoid punishment are also extrinsically motivated, even though numerous intrinsic benefits can ultimately accrue to those who, instead, view punishment avoidance as a challenge that can build their sense of competence and self-determination.

The above mentioned concepts of motivation are so far commonly seen in the leading books on applied linguistics.

As have been said before, in this area far and away the most important work done has been by Robert Gardner earlier with Wallace Lambert, and later with research associates the University of Western Ontario (Skehan, p52), they are the master researchers and the definitions of motivation they built are widely recognized ones. Other researchers need to listen to their voices.

Gardner and Lambert in their book, *Attitudes and Motivation* describe some case studied and illustrate two important orientations in some detail: an “instrumental outlook”, reflecting the practical value and advantage of learning a new language, and an “integrative outlook”, reflecting a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group. It was authors’ hunch that an integrative orientation would sustain better the long-term motivation needed for the very demanding task of second or foreign language learning.

Spolsky (Brown, p154) found that integrative motivation generally accompanied higher scores on proficiency task in a foreign Language in his study. He reached the conclusion that integrative motivation might be an important requirement for successful language learning indeed.

And actually some teachers and researchers have even gone so far as to claim that integrative motivation is absolutely essential for successful second language learning. This leads one to explore the reason why they hold the view.

Nevertheless some cases studied have provided evidence to challenge this claim. Yasmeeen Lukmani (Brown, p154) demonstrated that among Marathi-speaking Indian students learning English in India, those with higher instrumental motivation scored higher in tests of English proficiency. Gardner and Lambert themselves in the Philippine study found the instrumental approach to language study is extremely effective.

The main explanation is that because Gardner’s work has been carried out exclusively in a Canadian context. A primary claim is that Anglophone Canadians (primarily in a bilingual context) are more motivated by integrative motivation (positive attitude toward French speakers) than by an instrumental motivation (positive views of the rewards of learning French, a utilitarian motive). Therefore, integrative motivation is hypothesized to do a better predictor of second language success than instrumental motive.

The objection of other researchers to Gardner’s views is that the results are local to the Canadian situation rather than being globally applicable. Motivation could differ from culture to culture. Local conditions may play significant roles in motivations for language learning. Gass (p253) gave an example to illustrate this. He said that in the Northwest Amazon spouses must come from different ethnic groups. Then he asked whether the motivation to learn one’s spouse’s language more instrumental or integrative. The fact is that in many non-English speaking countries, especially in Third World countries where English had become an international language, English can be acquired very successfully for instrumental reasons alone. (Brown, p154) The interesting thing is that, even Gardner himself, with his associates, have recently found that certain contexts point toward instrumental orientation as an effective motive for language success and that others favor integrative motivation.

However, such variable findings in empirical investigations do not necessarily invalidate the integrative – instrumental structure. It has been pointed out once more that there is no single means of learning a second or foreign language: Some learners in some contexts are more successful in learning a language if they are integratively oriented, and others in different contexts benefit from an instrumental orientation.

As to other kinds of motivation, some researchers, such as Rossier (Rod Ellis, p516) argues that motivation are intrinsic interest should be emphasized, because without the desire to communicate, an integrative motivation may not be effective. It is the need to get meaning across and the pressure experienced when this is achieved that provides the motivation to learn a second language. Crooks and Schmidt (1991) and Brown (1990) also strongly favors intrinsic orientations, especially do long-term retention. Maslow (1970) claimed that intrinsic motivation is clearly superior to extrinsic.

It is important to make a distinction between the intrinsic – extrinsic instrument and Gardner’s integrative – instrumental motivation. One essential difference between the intrinsic – extrinsic continuum and integrative – instrumental continuum is that the former is free of the cultural beliefs and attitudes of learners and teachers, while the latter relies exclusively on a social-psychological approach. That is why the intrinsic – extrinsic continuum has almost got the same significance as the integrative – instrumental one. And this intrinsic – extrinsic continuum in motivation is applicable to foreign language classrooms around the world to harness the power of intrinsically motivated learners who are striving for excellence, autonomy and self-actualization. (Brown, p157)

It is likely that the relationship between motivation and achievement is an interactive one. A high level of motivation does stimulate learning, but perceived success in achieving L2 goals can help to maintain existing motivation and even create new types. Rod Ellis's conclusion (p515) finally put an end to the chicken-and-egg debate.

4 The current researches on the application of motivation in learning and teaching

Since the significant function of motivation has been universally acknowledged, more and more researchers are focusing on the practical application of motivation in language learning and teaching classroom. In modern times particularly in advanced countries, instructional approach is following the principles of students-centered teaching paradigm. Cooperative learning has thus been introduced into classroom.

Actually the instructional use of small groups in order to achieve common learning goals via cooperation has made an almost unprecedented impact in English language education during the last two decades. Intensive investigations have almost invariably indicated that this kind of learning is a highly effective classroom intervention, superior to most traditional forms of instruction in terms of producing learning gains and student achievement, higher-order thinking, positive attitudes towards learning, increased motivation, better teacher – student and student – student relationships accompanied by more developed interpersonal skills and higher self-esteem on the part of the student. However, the most important thing is that in psychological processes in cooperative language learning, the motivational system is generated by peer cooperation (Dornyei, 1977). Secondly, Norm and Reward system is one of features of cooperative learning. Under it, students are motivated to excel by their need for social approval and by the wish to avoid negative sanctions for not doing their fair share in working towards group success. (Ames & Ames, 1984) Thirdly, in cooperatively structured classrooms, autonomy-supporting classroom contexts lead to a higher level of long-term, intrinsic motivation. This claims that autonomy is at the core of the motivation to learn is also central to Deci and Ryan's (1985) influential "self-determination" theory which has shown that it exerts a significant positive impact on motivation in L2 context.

The number of different motivational aspects which CL significantly affects explains the remarkable results obtained in a major study on the role of motivation in CL by Sharan and Shaulov (1990), who found that more than half of the variance in achievement in three academic subjects was caused by the "motivation to learn" factor. Such a substantial impact is very rare in motivation studies in several. Therefore, how effective the motivational system promoted within cooperative situations is can be seen.

5 Self-critique

Since two Canadian psychologists, Gardner and Lamber started bringing motivation research into L2 field, much of the research has been done under their inspiration. Therefore, a lot of arguments have arisen.

I personally should think that motivation, as far as its notion is concerned, is a kind of strong stimulus which comes from a certain learner's perspective of his/her own social milieu and drives this learner to study hard and smart (e.g. use appropriate learning strategies) and finally acquire the proficiency of the target language in a quick and effective way. It could come either from the learner's inner desire to become integrated with the target language speaking community or external pressure which requires the learner to have a good command of the language to cope with daily life or both. In this sense, I agree with the interpretation of the integrative and instrumental motivation advances by Gardner and Lamber. But their dichotomy of motivation can not always represent the actual fact.

Besides, over a period of time, a certain kind of motivation could change and will not work well in the same community. Hummel and Belmechri in their report had approved this viewpoint. (1998, p219 – p244) They advanced that the definitions of orientations are context-dependent. However, it seems that this phenomenon has not been widely noted in this field. Later further research should be made in

more non-English speaking countries in naturalistic research method. Therefore, the results could be more rich and true and applicable.

In the concrete language classrooms, the instruction paradigm and other factors which can facilitate students to develop intrinsic motivation need to be further explored. Among all the composite motivations, the integrative-intrinsic motivation, in my opinion, is the best one. It is more closely associated with motivation level and those deep processing strategies such as cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Consequently, greater and more successful achievement can be attained. The integrative-intrinsic motivation can be fostered by teachers and parents in the CL.

6 Conclusions

Motivation in language learning is a very complicated psychological phenomenon And it is also the single most influential factor in learning a new language. (Gardner, 1985) It is these two reasons that motivation has been an important research topic in the field of applied linguistics all the time. With the advancement of globalization, more and more people will desire to learn another language to equip themselves both in work and in life. This has entrusted researchers to further investigate motivation in L2 or foreign language learning and its linkage with other factors and its function in facilitation the acquisition of the target language. It is all researchers hope that the fervent quest in this language teaching business will be to see to it that our future pedagogical tools can empower all the learners to turn their dream of mastering another language into reality.

References

- 1 Ames, C., & Ames, R., 1984. Systems of student and teacher motivation: Toward a qualitative definition. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76, p535 – p556
- 2 Belmechri Faiza and Hummel Kirsten, 1998. Orientations and Motivation in the Acquisition of English as a Second Language Among High School Students in Quebec City. *Language Learning* 48: 2, p219 – p244
- 3 Brown H. Douglas, 1994. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. USA: Prentice Hall Regents.
- 4 Chambers Gary, 1994. A snapshot in Motivation at 10+, 13 + and 16 +. *Language Learning Journal*, No. 9, p14 – p18.
- 5 Chang Shanmao Frank and Huang Shanghai Cindy, 1999. *Language Learning Motivation and Language Learning Strategies of Taiwanese EFL Students*. Unpublished essay, Indiana University of USA and National Changhua University of Taiwan.
- 6 Clement, R., Dornyei, Z., & Noels, K., 1994. Motivation, Self-confidence, and Group-cohesion in the foreign Language Classroom. *Language Learning*, 44, p418 – p448
- 7 Dornyei Zoltan, 1997. Psychological Processes in Cooperative Language Learning: Group Dynamics and Motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81, p482 – p491
- 8 Ellis Rod, 1986. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Great Britain: Oxford University Press.
- 9 Ellis Rod, 1994. *Second Language Acquisition*. HK: Oxford University Press.
- 10 Ellis Rod, 1997. *Second Language Acquisition*. HK: Oxford University Press.
- 11 Freeman Diane Larsen and Long Michael H., 1992. *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. Malaysia: Longman Group UK Limited.
- 12 Gardner R. C. and Lambert W. E, 1972. *Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning*. Rowley, MA: Wewbury House.
- 13 Gardner R. C., 1985. *The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London, Great Britain: Edward Arnold.
- 14 Gass Susan M. and Selinker Larry, 1994. *Second Language Acquisition – An Introductory Course*. USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

- 15 Lightbown Patsy M. & Spada Nina, 1993. *How Languages are Learned*. HK: Oxford University Press.
- 16 Lin, 1999. *Role of Attitudes / Motivation in Second Language Acquisition and The Relation of Anxiety with Second Language Learning*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, RMIT University.
- 17 Oxford Rebecca, 1999. Variables, Individual, in *Language Learning: Classroom Implications*. The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, Vol.9, p4896 – p4899.
- 18 Skehan Peter, 1991. *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning*. Great Britain: Edward Arnold.
- 19 Sung Hyekyung and Padiua Amado M., 1998. Student Motivation, Parental Attitudes, and Involvement in the Learning of Asian Languages in Elementary and Secondary Schools. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, p205 – p216.
- 20 Wilkins D. A., 1975. *Linguistics In Language Teaching*. London: Edward Arnold.