Learners' Motivation and the Implications for Classroom Teaching

LA MOTIVAITON DES APPRENANTS ET LES IMPLICATIONS DANS L'APPRENTISSAGE EN CLASSE

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Abstract: Motivation accounts for remarkable and significant places in individual differences and L2 acquisition. Moreover, its implications for classroom teaching seem to be more practical, which makes a great difference to teachers who can completely understand and take advantage of the implications.
Keywords: motivation; classroom teaching

Résumé: La motivation joue un rôle remarquable et signifiant dans les différences individuelles et l'acquissions de L2. Pourtant, ses implications pour l'apprentissage en classe apparaissent plus pratiques, ce qui engendre une grande différence dans les enseignants qui peuvent comprendre complètement et en bien profiter.
Mots-clés: motivation, apprentissage en classe.

Individual learners' differences contribute to the achievement of a foreign/second language (L2) acquisition: age, sex, previous experience with language learning, proficiency in the notice language, personality factors, language aptitude, attitudes and motivation, general intelligence, sense modality preference, sociological preference, cognitive styles and learner strategies. In this article, the focus will be on the learners' motivation which teachers can actively address to increase the effectiveness of instruction. In terms of their implications for class teaching focused on, a certain number of strategies which teachers could apply to facilitate individual learners to achieve their objectives will be suggested in the article.

1. CLASSIFICATION OF MOTIVATION

A consistent correlation between language achievement and motivation which is viewed as the key learner variable has been found in many studies during the last 50 years. Since 1990s, there has been a more heated interest in issues concerning motivation in second language learners, involving a great deal of discussion and debate. Researchers have been expanding the concept of L2 learning motivation by applying various branches of psychology. According to Tremblay &

Gardner (1995), among these concepts are intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, hierarchies of need, need for achievement, expectancy of good results, valence (subjective value associated with an outcome), attribution of causality, level of goals set for oneself in relation to difficulty and specificity and differential cognitive development. However, the most fully investigated and fundamental concepts of motivation are intrinsic-extrinsic motivation and integrative-instrumental motivation. In the following paragraphs, there will be an interpretation of them and analysis of factors affecting motivation.

1.1 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

People undertake language learning and persist in it for a variety of reasons. Some of them hold interest in the country and culture which the language represents, some seek the challenge, and others may want a tool to communicate with friends. For such people, language learning is something they do for their own reasons and for internal satisfactions. This kind of motivation is called intrinsic which contrasts with extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation represents the desire for some kind of external benefit, such as increased pay, job promotion, getting along in a foreign society or company, or meeting an organizational or academic requirement, even passing exams. These two

motivations are not mutually excusive all the time. Many students begin language class because they have to with an extrinsic motivation, but then they find that there is considerable personal satisfaction in the content, getting to know the people who speak a language, or understanding a new and different culture. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation may lead people into academic majors or careers in which a language is required and extrinsic one can appear (see Ehrman 1996).

1.2 Integrative and instrumental motivation

The field of language teaching has been influenced for many years by a model that came from studies of language immersion in Canada. Gardner (1985) suggests two forms of motivation, instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is very similar to extrinsic motivation which refers to learning to accomplish a task, such as passing a course, finding a good job, getting better pay, traveling, and so on. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, has to do with the desire to become part of a target language community which might involve both intrinsic (internal satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (getting along in a foreign community).

Integrative motivation is seen as very powerful and tends to bring about deep learning because a learner with integrative motivation are more active in class and will take advantage of every opportunity to satisfy the motivation-driven needs to expand and deepen knowledge. By contrast, an instrumentally motivated learner may stop efforts as soon as the profit disappears. However, that is not to say, integrative motivation is the only predictor of L2 achievement or instrumental motivation can not contribute to more successful learning. In fact, in many situations, instrumental motivation can be strong enough to drive learners to attain great academic achievements. Both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation can serve as remarkable predictors of success in L2 acquisition.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING MOTIVATION

Note worthily, motivation itself, as a strong indicator of language learning attainment will be interacted on by a number of factors.

First of all, a significant element which influences motivation is success/failure. Hermann (1980) claims that learners who do well are more likely to develop motivational intensity and to be active in the classroom. If one succeeds at a task, he or she is usually activated to do it some more with higher self-confidence and interest. Take myself for an example: I learned Japanese in

university because I had to and did not like it at all at the first beginning. But after getting full mark in the first final exam, I discovered my talent in it and was keen on it. Thereby, I kept the first place until my graduation. In this way success breeds further success. On the other hand, failure may result in avoidance of the challenge. For some, failure may lead to redoubled effort. Dörnyei and Cohen (2002) indicate that some learners will gain a positive impetus even from less-than-positive experiences, but Ehrman (1996) argues that it is only temporary, since effort with no payoff in the long term leads to discouragement. It seems that relationship between motivation and achievement is interactive. Ellis (1994: 515) states that '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. Conversely, a vicious circle of low motivation=low achievement = lower motivation can develop.'

Second, teachers play a crucial role in stimulating students to generate and maintain motivation. Teachers are the most visible figures in the classroom, embodying group conscience and serving as a reference and a standard. Moreover, Dörnyei and Cohen (2002) argue that their personal characteristics, their rapport with students and the specific ways they present tasks or give feedback and praise are all likely to have an impact on the students' commitment to learning. In September of 2003, my colleagues and I designed a self-questionnaire for testing the freshmen's motivation of learning English in the university which involves 56 of my students. Shockingly, only one showed interest in English learning before the first class. Four months later, we retested their motivation with the same questionnaire. 18 out of 56 showed integrative motivations, for example, they wished to go abroad, enjoy the culture and communicate with native speakers. Another 31 claimed that they wanted to pass CET4/6 (National College English Test: Band 4/6), or seek for promising jobs, namely a kind of instrumental motivation. One of the reasons why their motivation increased so much written down by the students was that: 'we like your teaching style and feel fun in class activities. What's more, your smile is really charming.'

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHING

As a university English teacher in china, I would like to associate the implications of motivation for classroom teaching with the situation in Chinese universities. In a Chinese university's non-English major classroom where English is learned as a foreign language, with the large class of 60 students or even more, it is rather hard for a teacher to take into account learners' individual factors. When it comes to the implications for classroom teaching, the emphasis is naturally put on motivation

which teachers can actively address to increase the effectiveness of instruction

Great work has been done on the implications of motivation for classroom teaching. Motivation research can really help classroom practitioners. A number of L2 scholars have offered considerable motivational recommendations (e.g. Oxford & Shearin 1994, Brown 2001). Out of them, Dörnyei (2001b) provides a more comprehensive summary which suggests four principles of motivational teaching practice: firstly, creating the basic motivational conditions (fostering a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere; keeping a good relationship with students; developing a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms); secondly, generating initial student motivation (increasing learners' expectancy of achievement and goal-orientedness; creating realistic learner beliefs; building students' needs and interests into teaching curriculum as much as possible); thirdly, maintaining and protecting motivation (making learning enjoyable and stimulating with a variety of motivating tasks; creating learner autonomy; protecting learners' self-esteem and self-confidence; setting specific learner goals; promoting self-motivating strategies and cooperation among learners); fourthly, encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation with providing motivational feedback, increasing learner satisfaction and offering rewards in a motivating manner.

In light of my own teaching experience and teaching context in China, to create and maintain students' motivation, the first thing I should take into account beforehand is students' needs. My three suggestions for motivation practice in classroom are closely relative to it.

In the first place, a curriculum development which both fosters learning and appeals to students sufficiently is necessary and of importance. McCombs and Whisler (1997:38, cited in Dörnyei 2001b) claims: 'Educators think students do not care, while the students tell us they do care about learning but are not getting what they need.' Actually, when learners have to learn something which they cannot see the point of because it seems no relevance to their lives anyhow, they would feel demotivated. It is unfortunately a common issue. As Brophy (2004) argues, most schools' curricular topics and learning activities are selected primarily on the basis of what society believes students need to learn, not on the basis of what students would choose if given the opportunity to do so. As educators or teachers, our responsibility is not only to find out what our students' needs, goals and interests are, what topics they want to learn about and what kinds of activities stimulate their motivation most, but also to try to build these into our curriculum as much as possible.

Second, grading students according to different needs and motivation makes sense. Individual needs and motivations vary from student to student. Learners with instrumental motivation might have dissimilar needs by contrast with learners with integrative motivation. Thus, their response to the same teaching content or activity would be distinct which may increase or decrease their motivation of L2 learning. Integrative-motivation-driven students seek more cultural background or literature in class which appears nothing to do with exams and like a waste of time in the eyes of most instrumental-motivation-driven students. In most Chinese universities, the student without a CET4/6 (National College English Test: Band 4/6) certificate is not be awarded a bachelor degree, in addition, he has to pass another national English test to go on with further study for a master degree. As teachers, we do not want to emphasize on test-orientedness. With the spread of CLT in China, more and more teachers apply the communicative approach in classroom teaching involving more interaction and negotiation with students which is welcomed by many students, in particular integratively motivated or higher level students. However, some intermediate or lower-level students do worry that it does not meet their needs to pass exams. In the limited class time, it is quite hard for teachers to handle curriculum and learning tasks to satisfy all the students. In view of all this, it might be practical to grade students according to different needs and motivation. At the beginning of their college study, teachers can help students find out what their needs are and set their goals with applying different teaching methods periodically and designing various activities. Then, one term later, students can choose different-grade classes where varied teaching materials and approaches are provided respectively in terms of their own interests. Basically, the English classes could be assorted into three grades: integatively motivated classes (concentrating on authentic materials and communicative approach), instrumentally motivated classes (focusing on learning strategies, skills for exams and special English related to students' majors) and mixed ones (balancing the two extreme directions).In this way, their motivation can be completely stimulated and protected. But then, there is a main problem that this idea is not mature enough, which demands careful research and further evidence.

One more significant issue is about teachers themselves. Teachers' crucial role in activating and maintaining learners' motivation has been interpreted in a former part. Csizer and Dörnyei (1998) argue that students generally consider the teacher's own behavior to be the single most important motivational tool which is one of the most underutilized motivational resources in the teacher's classroom practice. Since the great influence of teachers on students' motivation is of no doubt, what I concern here is that as teachers, how they can take full advantage of their ability and influential power. First of all, a teacher should improve his teaching by expanding knowledge and applying various teaching methods to meet students' needs. To make language class motivating, a knowledgeable and good teacher in their mind makes a difference. Next, a teacher should establish rapport with students and create a

pleasant and supportive atmosphere. As Dörnyei (2001b) argues that teachers who share warm, personal interactions with their students, who respond to their concerns in an empathic manner and are always ready to help, and who establish relationships of mutual trust and respect with learners, are more likely to invigorate them in academic matters than those who have no personal ties with learners. As teachers, we should keep harmony with students, encourage risk-taking, have a tolerance of mistakes and bring in humor to generate an easy and pleasant learning atmosphere. In addition, never hesitate to encourage students by offering rewards and praise which may help them build up self-confidence and a feeling of success that generate higher motivation and promise further achievements. Praise has been considered a positive method to inspire students' learning all the time, whereas, overusing rewards can be harmful. Brophy (2004) points out that when people begin to concentrate on the reward rather than on the learning task, the actual values associated with the task itself will be neglected.

Individual learners may hold different beliefs on language learning, which brings about various learning strategies in choice and might lead to distinguishing outcomes. Students who believe that good learners should use mnemonics will try to remember words by word-association or rhymes. Students who regard memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules as the best way to learn English will emphasize repetition and drill practice, consequently their linguistic competence will be improved. By contrast, those who hold the opinion that the key point of language learning is communication, will make their own opportunities and find strategies for getting practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom to achieve their goals. Although there is no strong relationship between learners' beliefs and success of language learning according to most researches, some researches do indicate belief might affect learning outcomes. Further study is needed.

4. CONCLUSION

Motivations, one components of individual variety which have significant implications for class teaching, inevitably demand more sufficient and affirmatory theoretical support. We are still, perhaps, a long way from applying perfectly in the classroom the experimental findings on motivation, but further study is surely a promising direction to take in pursuit of the goal of understanding individual differences in academic achievement (Crozier 1997).

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