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MOTIVATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

There is still much debate as to what specific factors influence motivation in language learning. It is not clear how motivation affects a continued interest or success or failure in language learning, especially in an foreign language setting.

Research on motivation at first only concentrated on two main motivational orientations of language learners. More recently, studies have shown a wider range of factors at work.

In the literature on motivation, very rarely is one single, integrated definition of motivation included. Instead, the focus is what specific factors work together to create motivation. R. Ellis, in an overview of research on motivation, simply asserted that motivation affects the extent to which language learners persevere in learning, what kinds of behavior they exert, and their actual achievement. R. Wlodwoski explained motivation as “the processes that can: a) arouse and instigate behavior; b) give direction or purpose to behavior, continue to allow behavior to persist; d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior” [1: 2].

R. Gardner was one of the pioneering researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) to focus on motivation. He chose to define motivation by specifying four aspects of motivation: 1) a goal; 2) effortful behavior to reach the goal; 3) a desire to attain the goal; 4) positive attitudes toward the goal [2: 50].

A goal, however, was not necessarily a measurable component of motivation. Instead, a goal was a stimulus that gave rise to motivation. R. Gardner focused on classifying reasons for second language study, which he then identified as orientations. He found two main orientations through his research: 1) integrative: a favorable attitude toward the target language community; possibly a wish to integrate and adapt to a new target culture through

use of the language; 2) instrumental: a more functional reason for learning the target language, such as job promotion, or a language requirement.

R. Gardner specifically delineated the difference between these orientations and actual motivation. Motivation “refers to a complex of three characteristics which may or may not be related to any particular orientation. These characteristics are attitudes toward learning the language, desire to learn the language, and motivational intensity” [2: 54]. For example, an integrative orientation was a class of reasons suggesting why a person might undertake language study, including a desire to integrate with a target language community. By itself, this simply reflected a goal which might or might not lack motivational power. On the other hand, an integrative motive included this orientation, plus the motivation, which included desire, motivational intensity, and a number of other attitudes involving the target language community.

Gardner’s socio-educational model of motivation focused on the integrative motive. Motivation was the central concept of the model, but there were also some factors which affected this, such as integrativeness and attitudes. These were other factors that influenced individual differences, and were seen as complex variables. R. Gardner received criticism for focusing so much on the integrative motive.

R. Clément and B. Kruidenier designed a research study in order to specify further factors that influence motivation. From survey results, four different orientations to language study were identified. The instrumental orientation was an important factor, along with reasons such as travel, seeking new friendships, and acquiring knowledge. They acknowledged that the “relative status of learner and target groups as well as the availability of (or at least familiarity with) the latter in the immediate environment are important determinants of the emergence of orientations” [3: 288]. The challenge was to look not at the universality of integrative and instrumental orientations, but to look more at “who learns what in what milieu” [3: 288].

C. Ely designed the study wanting to address the possibility that the integrative/instrumental dichotomy did not capture the full spectrum of student motivation. To his surprise, there were clusterings of motivation that resembled instrumental and integrative orientations, even though the survey was not formed on the basis of that prior theory [4].

C. Crookes and R. Schmidt also worked to move beyond the instrumental and integrative orientations, specifically looking at how motivation includes both internal and external factors. They identified four internal and attitudinal factors: 1) interest in the language based on existing attitudes, experience and background knowledge; 2) relevance (some needs being met by language learning); 3) expectancy of success or failure; 4) outcomes (extrinsic/intrinsic rewards). Three internal characteristics that they specified were: the language learner decides to engage in language learning; the language learner persists over time and interruptions; the language learner maintains a high activity level [5].

Z. Dörnyei was also concerned with expanding the model of motivation beyond two orientations, specifically in a foreign language setting. He stated that “the exact nature of the social and pragmatic dimensions of second language motivation is always dependent on who learns what languages where” [6: 275]. Contrary to R. Gardner’s focus on integrativeness, Z. Dörnyei asserted that in a foreign language setting instrumental orientation would have a greater influence on language learners. He created a model of foreign language learning motivation that could account for and include some of the expanding views of motivation. Three different levels of factors were included, which not only allowed for the inclusion of orientations but also for specific situations that involved the learner and the surrounding context: 1) the language level, which encompasses both integrative and instrumental motivational subsystems focusing on reactions and attitudes toward the target language; 2) the learner level, which focuses on the individual’s reaction to the language and the learning situation. At this level different cognitive theories of motivation are included; 3) the learning situation level, which takes into account specific motivational factors connected with the teacher,

the course, and the group of language learners with which an individual interacts. This level consists of extrinsic and intrinsic motives in different areas. Extrinsic motivation consists of doing “something because of an external reward that may be obtained, while intrinsic motivation is demonstrated when we do something because we get rewards enough from the activity itself” [5: 14]. These two motives are not necessarily mutually antagonistic. However, extrinsic motivation can undermine intrinsic motivation. Traditional school settings often cultivate extrinsic motivation, but under certain circumstances classroom rewards can be combined with or lead to intrinsic motivation.

Z. Dörnyei specified that each of these different levels, language, learner and learning situation, seem to have an effect independent of the others. He stated that “...each of the three levels of motivation exert their influence independently of the others and have enough power to nullify the effects of the motives associated with the other two levels” [6: 78]. However, in regard to his framework, he also said that “many of its components have been verified by very little or no empirical research in the second field” [6: 283].

Therefore, it is necessary for more research to explore the nature of a foreign language setting in language instruction, how that affects motivation in learners, and to include the possibility of a wide range of motivational factors which influence the language experience.

LITERATURE

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