



Motivation and Lack Thereof: Effects of Students' Motivation on Their Second/Foreign Language Learning Process

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Abstract

In language learning, motivation is one of the key elements to which students have to pay special attention as it plays a major role in their acquisition. This paper will expose a case study regarding motivation and the negative counterparts that affect it. It will also discuss several motivation theories and the learning process students from the University of Guanajuato have struggled with whenever having trouble with keeping their motivation. This study made use of interviews to collect data that shows the direct relationship between the level of motivation and the level of success in language acquisition.

Keywords: second language, foreign language, motivation, acquisition, learning, theory, learner, effect.

1. Introduction

Motivation is an important determinant of the students' success in ability performance and competence regarding Second Language Acquisition (Gardner, 1968). It is equally related to Foreign Language Acquisition as well. This motivation can be the result of the studying/learning process or the cause for it to happen. This paper will review several motivation theories and how relevant they are in relation to SLA and FLA. It will discuss how motivation changes over time and the positive or negative effects upon the learning process. The paper will also reflect upon how anxiety and impostor syndrome can be directly related to the acquisition and performance of a language other than the native language of the learner.

The paper will be divided in sections for a better understanding: literature review, which will discuss the topics related to the case study; the methodology which will include the research questions used for the development of the research; the third section will describe the methodology used for this paper and lastly the inquiry tools and the questions utilized for the data collection.

2. Literature review

The main concepts applied in this paper are motivation, anxiety, and impostor syndrome regarding second language acquisition and foreign language acquisition.

2.1 *Motivation*

Motivation is defined by Gardner (1968) as the attempt of achieving a goal as well as the desire towards it. According to Gardner, motivation can influence to what extent a learner acquires skills for communication purposes. It is important to discuss how the motivation each learner has will affect their relationship with the language and its use (Carrió-Pastor & Mestre, 2014). Firstly, it is needed to discuss the different types of motivation, their source, and their results. The root of motivation can vary according to the background of the learner. Their initial profile, which consists of the place of their upbringing, their native language and what were the circumstances of their relationship with the target language. Motivation can be divided into four types: intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumentalist, and integrative.

Intrinsic motivation happens when a learner starts learning a language for internal reasons such as personal interest of learning, personal growth, or the desire for a feeling of self-fulfillment. This type of motivation comes from within the learner and their individual characteristics, such as self-determination and effort, which affect the way the learner acts to achieve the goal of learning a language. Learners who have this motivation in language learning work without pressure, seeing it as a challenging but enjoyable process. Intrinsic motivation is the most variable type since it is directly related to the internal state of the learner, thus making it unpredictable. However, intrinsic motivation pushes the individual towards the learning process seeing it as a goal in itself (Reiss, 2012).

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation depends on other factors that are not directly related to the learner (Junko, 2005). This type of motivation relies upon the search for external rewards such as better grades in subjects at school or academic recognition. This type of motivation appears at the moment the learner identifies an external gain. The interest the learner has in getting this benefit is what drives their actions and puts pressure onto achieving the established goal. Extrinsic motivation is often steady, and it is less likely to change over time (Chiew & Poh, 2015). However, once the goal is reached, the extrinsic motivation decreases, and the learner stops making an effort. This type of motivation can be altered by the teacher by offering the students rewards that interest them. Extrinsic motivation has a downside, since the learner has no interest outside of the reward, the content learned during this process is neither relevant nor a priority.

Instrumentalist motivation can be identified when a learner has a specific goal to achieve, and the target language is a medium for achieving it (Wee, 2003). This type of motivation can be related to the extrinsic since they are both connected to external factors of recognition. The most common goals regarding instrumentalist motivation are getting promoted at a job or getting a job where one of the qualifications needed is the ability to speak a target language. Since this type of motivation is definite and specific it does not tend to change over time, and it is a reliable source of motivation (Alizadeh, 2016).

Lastly, integrative motivation has to do with the learner and the target language's culture (Strong, 1984). The main objective for acquiring the language is becoming familiar with the culture and integrating the learner in it (Gardner, 2001). Integrative motivation is a long-term interest for the learner, which becomes a reliable and steady source of motivation.

2.2 Anxiety

Another concept related to motivation is anxiety, which interferes with the relationship the learner has with the language (MacIntyre, 2002). Anxiety in language acquisition is often experienced when the learner starts applying the knowledge to communicate with others, making them self-conscious and self-aware, hindering any advances. This anxiety can be manifested through the interaction with other learners or native speakers of the language, or stay within the learner (Zheng, 2008).

2.3 Impostor syndrome

Impostor syndrome affects the learner as well, it consists of the inhibition of the speaker to perform any communication because of the feeling of unauthenticity and impostorhood. This syndrome happens only to learners when they are producing a language, since they feel fake or like they do not know enough about the language (Bernat, 2008). This syndrome affects heavily the communication performance of the learners, as it hinders a fluent production and makes them uncomfortable producing the language.

3. Methodology

According to Woody (1924) research has to include the definition of a problem as well as formulating a hypothesis, collecting, and analyzing data to determine if the hypothesis is applicable. This study's purpose is to identify how motivation affects second language learners.

3.1 Subjects of the study

The subjects of the study are students of Universidad de Guanajuato between the ages of 18 to 35 of any gender. The subjects are learners of three languages: French, German, and English. These languages are being learned as foreign languages, with the exception of the subject who is learning English as a second language.

3.2 Research questions

What kind of motivations are there regarding language learning? Do they change over time?

How does the learner's type of motivation affect their SLA process and their behavior in a classroom and social setting?

3.3 Qualitative approach

Qualitative approach in research allows one to have a wider view in a subject that cannot be categorized with numbers and statistical data. The approach applied to this case study is of a phenomenological nature. The experience of the subjects will relate their SLA to their motivation in order to investigate if existing theories regarding motivation are applicable and provable (Pathak et al., 2013).

3.4 Inquiry tool: Interview

In research, an interview allows the researcher to gather data for further analysis in relation to the topic selected (Nigel et al., 2000). The interview designed for this paper contains several questions that will allow the relationship between motivation and language-learning issue to be explored in depth. It includes open-ended questions that will be related to motivation theories.

4. Analysis and discussion of results

The third question of the interview is about if the subjects feel motivated in their learning process. The subject that is learning German answered that they do feel motivated and what makes them feel motivated is their ability to learn any language. This type of motivation can be identified as intrinsic, where the learner sees the learning process as the goal itself (Junko, 2005).

The subject who is learning English answered that what motivates them to learn the language is the necessity they have of expanding their knowledge in order to have more knowledge about the topics they are interested in. This motivation is instrumentalist, the goal is to be able to use the language as a tool for learning about other topics (Wee, 2003).

In the question '*Do you feel the same motivation as when you first started?*' the English-learning subject answered that they did not feel motivated at the beginning because they did not want to learn the language for a personal reason, so they saw the learning process as a negative thing. In the same question, the subject explains that with the time they overcame this view and enjoyed it more with time. However, they kept on learning the language. This shows that instrumentalist motivation is a steady source of motivation for the learner.

The question '*What do you do to keep motivated?*' the French learner answered that they use educative apps that congratulate their progress. Though the reason for their learning process is personal satisfaction, the extrinsic factor of praise helps them with motivation.

In the section of the interview where the subjects were asked the obstacles they have faced, all subjects coincided in insecurity when speaking their target language and lack of individual motivation at times. This can be related to the anxiety and impostor syndrome, the learners struggle with language production because of fear of public exposure of not being accurate.

In conclusion, motivation is perhaps the biggest factor learners have to deal with during their learning process. It is important for students to identify their motivation source to help them carry on learning. Thus, language instructors must have knowledge in techniques and strategies to help students. It is a fundamental part in the formation of language teachers.

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