Theory and Practice in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching
Final Project

Motivation as Key Element in Second Language Learning
and Teaching: A Survey of Preliminary Concepts

Tommaso Pepe

1. *The engine of learning*

Motivation represents a key element in the process of second language learning and teaching. Though not being directly related to the cognitive dynamics involved in the learning process, motivation has been often described as the key engine in all activities involved in the learning in a second language. In my personal experience as a teacher, I have usually tried to motivate and engage my students relying on empathy, enthusiasm and a personal direct involvement in the classroom. Although all these 'emotional' elements may prove essential in promoting a positive and engaging environment during the course, I am glad that the study and reflection in these last weeks gave me the opportunity to deepen this particular theme in second language acquisition theory.

There exists an extensive *corpus* of critical literature dealing with the structure and the role of motivation in the acquisition of a second language (for a preliminary review see Dörney 1998). A first comprehensive conceptual "paradigm" about motivation in second language acquisition was developed by Robert Gardner in the 1970s. Linking together insights derived from social psychology and SLA theory, Gardner stressed out how, beyond the individual "aptitude" of a learner towards language learning, student's *attitude* and motivation toward the target language might significantly influence the outcome of the learning process (Gardner 1985). Gardner's theory of motivation focused on an "integrative approach:" the main drive

behind language learning consisted in the desire of the language learning to get integrated in the L2 language community. Students' success when learning the target language may be explained by the desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society into which the language is used.

Over the course of years this paradigm has been gradually expanded, bringing into purview also the "instrumental" factor involved in language learning motivation: the desire to acquire a language for the tangible and concrete benefits that such knowledge is able to offer (Hudson 2000). At the same time, in the early 1990s, research on language learning motivation had a radical "educational shift", as the main focus shifted from social attitudes to an analysis of the classroom reality, identifying and examining classroom specific motives (Dörney 1998: 124-125).

1. *The structure of motivation in language learning*

Drawing insight from this extensive body of research, Csizér and Dörney have developed a global conceptualization of motivation in second language acquisition, subdivided in seven key components: *Integrativeness*, *Instrumentality*, *Vitality of the L2 Community*, *Attitudes toward the L2 Speakers/Community*, *Cultural Interest*, *Linguistic Self-Confidence* and *Milieu* (Dörney and Csizér 2005: 20-22). Along with the push towards integration in the L2 community and the instrumental value deriving from the acquisition of a second language, this description of the various elements of language learning takes into consideration additional factors that, at various levels, may influence the results of the learning effort.

Vitality of the L2 Community and *Attitudes toward the L2 Speakers/Community* concern the perceived importance and wealth of the L2 communities, their "ethnolinguistic" vitality and the attitude that the student might have toward them. *Cultural Interest* reflects the appreciation

of cultural products associated with the particular L2 and with the cultural identity associated with the reality associated with the target language. Rather than being however limited to the simple fruition of cultural or media products and to other "foreign language learning contexts," this concept has been gradually expanded so as to include a wider "social-cultural dimension" in L2 motivation, covering "an interest in the way of life and the artistic production of the target language group" (Csizér and Dörney 2005: 21). *Linguistic Self-Confidence* is a concept introduced by Richard Clement (Clement, 1980). With regards to motivation, linguistic self-confidence indicates the belief, on the part of the student, to be able to acquire a mastery of the L2: without such feeling a learner can be hardly motivated to pursue the effort of studying a second language. *Milieu*, eventually, is a concept used to refer to the "social influences stemming from the immediate environment" of the student, influences that may derive from a "perceived influence" of both the familiar and the social community of the learner.

The knowledge of these components and of their impact in the motivation of the L2 student might thus help the instructor in acquiring familiarity with specific aspects of the student's attitude toward the studying of the target language, knowing thus which specific motivational aspects might (or need to) be stimulated within the classroom context.

2. *The dynamic structure of motivation*

On the other hand, in one of his studies Dörnyei has also emphasized another and often neglected aspect of motivation in L2 teaching: its dynamic nature and temporal variation (Dörnyei 2003, but see also Dörnyei *et al.* 2015). Motivation can change through time and, most significantly, different stages and moments of the learning process may require different motivational strategies. It is thus important to take into account the "several discrete temporal segments" in which the motivational drive is organized. According to Dörnyei, these temporal

segments may be subdivided into a "preactional," and "actional" and "postactional stage" (Dörnyei 2003: 17-21). The *preactional stage* occurs *before* the beginning of the learning process, when motivation needs to be generated and stimulated and when wished and desires need to be transformed into achievable goals. Next is the *actional stage*, in which the motivation needs to be "maintained and protected," so as to ensure the continuation of the learning effort. Finally, in the *postactional stage* learners are engaged into a "retrospective evaluation" of their results. This last stage, in which students become aware of their own achievements, will in fact influence the attitude with which learners will consider further and more complex learning goals. The capacity to get awareness of one's own achievements and capacities becomes an important factor in the self-confidence of the learner and consequently in his confidence towards more complex and difficult learning objectives.

3. *From motivation theory to motivational strategies*

Although the past decades have seen the development of a significant body of literature dedicated to research in L2 learning motivation, with numerous analysis about "what" motivation is and what are its "components" and "stages," little has been said on the other hand about "how" this theoretical knowledge can be applied in the actual classroom. Some scholars have thus tried to include in their research some attempts at analyzing, elaborating and implementing a set of "motivational strategies:" techniques "that promote the individual's goal-related behavior" (Dörnyei 2001: 28). As observed by Dörnyei, motivational strategies may be organized around some key aspects of L2 teaching:

- They can focus on the "internal structure" of a typical language class and cluster, trying then to stimulate learners' motivation in the class and in its specific contents.

- They can try to propose a "trouble-shooting guide," addressing some of the main motivation-related issues that may arise in a classroom environment (e.g. how to motivate students who have apparently no interest in the class).

- They can be based on some "key motivational elements" involved in second language teaching – such as self-confidence, cultural interest, instrumental orientation, etc. – and using these concepts as main organizing principle of motivational strategies that may be adopted across the entire course.

- They can focus on the main typologies of teacher behavior, analyzing the effect such behaviors may have in motivating (or demotivating) language learners.

Drawing thus insight from both theoretical analysis and empirical practice, Dörney has thus developed a complex reference list of motivational strategies that may be implemented in a language class (the list is reproduced in the Appendix). This model may thus be used by language teachers as a first preliminary reference guide to reflect and gain awareness about the motivational strategies that are either already incorporated in a teaching practice or that, alternatively, may be integrated so as to further improve the quality of the teaching experience.

APPENDIX

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM
(from Dörney 2001: 137-144, with some reductions and adjustments)

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES: CREATING THE BASIC MOTIVATIONAL CONDITIONS OUT TEACHING	Tried it out	Part of my teaching
1. Demonstrate and talk about your own enthusiasm for the course material, and how it affects you personally - Share your own personal interest in the L2 with your students - Show students that you value L2 learning as a meaningful experience that produces satisfaction and enriches your life		
2. Take the students' learning very seriously. - Show students that you care about their progress		

- Indicate your mental and physical availability for all things academic - Have sufficiently high expectations for what your students can achieve		
3. Develop a personal relationship with your students - Show students that you accept and care about them - Pay attention and listen to each of them - Indicate your mental and physical availability		
4. Create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere in the classroom - Establish a norm of tolerance - Encourage risk-taking and have mistakes accepted as a natural part of learning - Bring in and encourage humour - Encourage learners to personalize the classroom environment according to their taste		
5. Promote the development of group cohesiveness - Try and promote interaction, cooperation and the sharing of genuine personal information among the learners - Use ice-breakers at the beginning of a course - Regularly use small-group tasks where students can mix - Encourage and if possible organize extracurricular activities and outings - Try and prevent the emergence of rigid seating patterns - Include activities that lead to the successful completion of whole group tasks or involve small-group competition games - Promote the building of a group legend		
6. Formulate group norms explicitly, and have them discussed and accepted by the learners - Include a specific `group rules' activity at the beginning of a group's life to establish the norms explicitly - Explain the importance of the norms you mandate and how they enhance learning, and ask for the students' agreement - Elicit suggestions for additional rules from the learners and discuss these in the same way as the rules you have proposed - Put the group rules (and the consequences for violating them) on display		

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES: GENERATING INITIAL MOTIVATION	Tried it out	Part of my teaching
7. Raise the learners' intrinsic interest in the L2 learning process - Highlight and demonstrate aspects of L2 learning that your students are likely to enjoy - Make the first encounters with the L2 a positive experience		
8. Promote `integrative' values by encouraging a positive and open-minded disposition towards the L2 and its speakers, and towards foreignness in general - Include a sociocultural component in your language curriculum - Quote positive views about language learning by influential public figures. - Encourage learners to conduct their own exploration of the L2 community (e.g. on the internet) - Promote contact with L2 speakers and L2 cultural products		
9. Promote the students' awareness of the instrumental values associated with the knowledge of an L2 - Regularly remind students that the successful mastery of the L2 is instrumental to the accomplishment of their valued goals - Reiterate the role the L2 plays in the world, highlighting its potential usefulness both for themselves and their community - Encourage the learners to apply their L2 proficiency in real-life situations		

	Tried it out	Part of my teaching
10. Increase the students' expectancy of success in particular tasks and in learning in general - Make sure that they receive sufficient preparation and assistance - Make sure they know exactly what success in the task involves - Make sure that there are no serious obstacles to success.		
10. Increase your students' goal-orientedness by formulating explicit class goals accepted by them - Have the students negotiate their individual goals and outline a common purpose, and display the final outcome in public - Draw attention from time to time to the class goals and how particular activities help to attain them - Keep the class goals achievable by re-negotiating if necessary		

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES: MAINTAINING AND PROTECTING MOTIVATION	Tried it out	Part of my teaching
11. Make learning more stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of classroom events - Vary the learning tasks and other aspects of your teaching as much as you can - Focus on the motivational flow and not just the information flow in your class - Occasionally do the unexpected		
12. Make learning stimulating and enjoyable for the learner by increasing the attractiveness of the tasks - Make tasks challenging - Make task content attractive by adapting it to the students' natural interests or by including novel, intriguing, exotic, humorous, competitive or fantasy elements - Personalize learning tasks - Select tasks that yield tangible, finished products		
13. Use goal-setting methods in your classroom - Encourage learners to select specific, short-term goals for themselves - Emphasize goal completion deadlines and offer ongoing feedback		
14. Provide learners with regular experiences of success - Provide multiple opportunities for success in the language class - Adjust the difficulty level of tasks to the students' abilities and counterbalance demanding tasks with manageable ones - Design tests that focus on what learners can rather than cannot do, and also include improvement options		
14. Help diminish language anxiety by removing or reducing the anxiety-provoking elements in the learning environment - Avoid social comparison, even in its subtle forms - Promote cooperation instead of competition - Help learners accept the fact that they will make mistakes as part of the learning process - Make tests and assessment completely `transparent' and involve students in the negotiation of the final mark		
15. Increase student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy - Allow learners real choices about as many aspects of the learning process as possible - Hand over as much as you can of the various leadership/teaching roles and functions to the learners - Adopt the role of a facilitator		

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES: ENCOURAGING POSITIVE SELF-EVALUATION	Tried it out	Part of my teaching
16. Promote effort attributions in your students		

- Encourage learners to explain their failures by the lack of effort and appropriate strategies applied rather than by their insufficient ability - Refuse to accept ability attributions and emphasize that the curriculum is within the learners' ability range		
17. Provide students with positive information feedback - Notice and react to any positive contributions from your students - Provide regular feedback about the progress your students are making and about the areas which they should particularly concentrate on		
18. Use grades in a motivating manner, reducing as much as possible their demotivating impact - Make the assessment system completely transparent, and incorporate mechanisms by which the students and their peers can also express their views - Make sure that grades also reflect effort and improvement and not just objective levels of achievement - Apply continuous assessment that also relies on measurement tools other than pencil-and-paper tests - Encourage accurate student self-assessment by providing various self-evaluation tools		

References

Clément, Richard (1980), "Ethnicity, contact and communicative competence in a second language," in Howard Giles, William Peter Robinson, Philip Smith, (eds.), *Language: Social-psychological perspectives*. Oxford: Pergamon, pp. 147–154.

Dörney, Zoltán (1998), "Motivation in second and foreign language learning," *Language Teaching*, 31(3), 117-135.

――― (2001), *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

――― (2003), "Attitudes, Orientations, and Motivations in Language Learning: Advances in Theory, Research, and Applications," *Language Learning*, 53(1), 3-20.

Dörney, Zoltán and Csizér Kata (2005), "The Internal Structure of Language Learning Motivation and Its Relationship with Language Choice and Learning Effort," *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(1), 19-36.

Dörnyei, Zoltán, MacIntyre, Peter, Alastair, Henry (2015), *Motivational Dynamics in Language Learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Gardner, Robert (1985), *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.

Hudson, Grover (2000), *Essential Introductory Linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.