

5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Educational Sciences - WCES 2013

## Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

María Luisa Carrió-Pastor \*, Eva M. Mestre Mestre

*Departamento de Lingüística Aplicada, Universitat Politècnica de València, Camino de Vera s/n, Valencia 46022, Spain*

---

### Abstract

In this study, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are examined to establish the correlation between the form of motivation and successful second language acquisition. The analysis studies whether other aspects, such as the degree in which the specificity of the courses or the introduction of an immersive virtual world can modify the students' self-efficacy beliefs. Two groups of students were selected to carry out a qualitative study on motivation. The activities and results obtained in both groups were contrasted in order to determine if the two basic types of motivation played a relevant role in second language acquisition. It can be stated that the results showed that the pre-conceived beliefs of learners were relevant in certain activities, i.e. collaborative, web based activities; and in the demand for a definite syllabus of the course.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

*Keywords:* motivation, second language acquisition, virtual world, learners' beliefs.

---

### 1. Introduction

Student's motivation, as defined by Gardner (1982), is composed of three elements; effort (the time spent studying and the drive of the learner), desire (the yearning to become proficient in the language) and affect (the emotional reactions of the learning towards studying). Thus, it could be defined as the various purposes that are part of the goals to learn a second language. Motivation is divided into two basic types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is characterized by the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community. Instrumental motivation underlies the goal to gain some social or economic reward through L2 achievement, thus referring to a more functional reason for language learning.

The concepts of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs are defined in this research considering the points of view of Wenden (1987) and Horwitz (1987). Metacognition is defined as "thinking about one's own thoughts" (Hacker, 1998: 3). From this, several implications can be derived, such as a "reflection and evaluation of thinking that may result in making specific changes in how learning is managed, and in the strategies chosen for this purpose" (Anderson, 2008: 99).

Our main interest has been originated from research on learner autonomy and learner strategies (Wenden and Rubin, 1987). In the classroom context, the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and metacognitive knowledge of the students enrolled in a learning situation have been recognized as significant contributory factors in the learning process. Sakul and Gales (2002), Bernat and Gvozdenko (2006) and Siskin (2008) provide some examples that

---

\* Corresponding Author: María Luisa Carrió-Pastor. Tel.: +34-963877530  
E-mail address: [lcarrío@idm.upv.es](mailto:lcarrío@idm.upv.es)

illustrate how second or foreign language students may hold strong beliefs about the nature of the language under study. For instance, they can consider its degree of difficulty, the process of its acquisition, the success of certain learning strategies, the existence of aptitude, their own expectations about achievement and teaching methodologies, etc. Identification of these beliefs and reflection on their potential impact on language acquisition as well as in more specific areas such as the learners' expectations and strategies used, can inform future syllabus design and teacher practice in the course.

There are different kinds of knowledge implied in second language acquisition. In this study, we are interested in the strategic knowledge used by the teacher and its effect when applied to students. Strategic knowledge refers to the information about what strategies are likely to be effective in achieving the learning goal (Flavell, 1979). In other words, strategic knowledge is general knowledge about the nature and utility of strategies (Wenden, 1987). More precisely, it includes information about the strategies as such, why they are useful and specific knowledge about when and how to use them (Wenden, 1998). Metacognitive knowledge is a relatively stable body of knowledge, which may change over time. This knowledge may be acquired formally or informally, and consciously, e.g. in a class or unconsciously, e.g. imitating somebody. As learners gain in cognitive maturity, they may reflect on their learning processes and revise earlier assumptions or develop new ones.

Wenden (1999: 436) also distinguishes metacognitive knowledge from metacognitive strategies and refers to the former as information, which learners acquire about learning, and to the latter as consists of general skills that allow learners to "manage, direct, regulate, and guide the learning process". Wenden (2001) provides further insight on the function of language learners' metacognitive knowledge in learning. She focuses on the nature of the interaction that defines the relationship between what learners know and how they self-direct their learning.

The focus of this research was the analysis of the motivation of Higher Education students when learning a second language, specifically, English. The analysis was twofold; the integrative and the instrumental motivation of students when acquiring a second language were analysed and compared. To do this, we considered their attitude towards the target language, the individual economic and the social factors surrounding their language acquisition, and furthermore, the use of technology as a new type of motivation for some individuals. Henderson, Huang, Grant and Henderson (2009) have also considered this last aspect, specifically the integration of the virtual world as a strategy to motivate students.

The objectives of this research were first, to discuss the role that motivation has in language acquisition as a specific variable at higher education level. Second, to check whether the specificity of the courses had some effect in the student's motivations, and thirdly, to study whether the introduction of technology, by means of self-defined activities and the recreation of an on-line world improved students' capacity to use English language in a variety of real-life contexts.

## 2. Methodology

Two groups of students were selected for a qualitative study on motivation. One of the groups (henceforth group A) was composed of twenty students enrolled in a specific English class offered as an optional subject in an engineering degree at Universitat Politècnica de València; Technical English, taught in the Degree of Electrical Engineering in the first academic year. The second group included in the analysis (henceforth group B) was composed of twenty university students enrolled in an English course aimed to improve general concepts of English. The subject was taught in the Degree of Geometrics and Topography as an optional subject.

During the classes, group A used a specific handbook as classroom material with references to the economic and social environment of engineering (English for Engineering, CUP); meanwhile, group B used on-line material which mixed grammatical and cultural contents. The activities carried out by this group of students included the selection and completion of online activities as well as the participation in a software programme which invited to the recreation of an on-line world. The motivation shown by students of both groups was contrasted in order to determine whether integrative motivation (which can be measured by means of the positive attitudes shown by students toward the target language and culture) and instrumental motivation (assessed by the gain-related motivation) had played a relevant role in the students instruction considering the different materials used in their

acquisition of a second language. The analysis focused on the relevance of using on-line material to motivate students.

In group A, teachers proposed to students repetitive exercises and asked them to perform a task the same way regardless of the topic. Teachers often presented the task as if it could only be performed one way. In addition, the key to the activities was included at the end of the handbook, which implied that most exercises proposed were based on closed-ended questions. In group B, teachers presented materials and invited students to plan individually their own learning, and decide what to do or emphasize in each lesson. Teachers helped students to customise the materials according to their own needs and abilities or experiences and the context in which they were expected to be used. Students were thus able to adapt the material to their language level and repeat some exercises, depending on the difficulty. In both groups, teachers acted as tutors, helping students and working collaboratively in the classroom.

In order to measure the motivation and their relationship with students' beliefs, two questionnaires were designed. Students were asked to fill in questionnaires when they finished their term. The questions related to motivation asked to the students of both groups were:

1. Integrative motivation:

- a) What is the role of the teacher in the classroom?
- b) Do you consider your English level adequate to pass the subject?
- c) Do you consider relevant the learning strategies in your English class?
- d) Do you feel confident in your English class?
- e) Have you improved your English knowledge?
- f) Are you going to enrol in a similar English course next year?

2. Instrumental motivation:

- a) Do you consider English relevant?
- b) Do you prefer to learn English than another foreign language? why?
- c) Are you going to use English in a professional environment?
- d) Do your family or friends speak English?
- e) Is English a lingua franca?
- f) Do you use English in the Internet?

Both groups were asked the same questions, disregarding the type of methodology that had been used in the language classroom. The answers were contrasted in order to measure the integrative and instrumental motivations of both groups. The results extracted helped us to link the type of motivation to the type of language learning environment created for the purpose and determine if different learning strategies varied students' motivation and if the attitude towards the target language or the economic and social motivation changed depending on the material and the teacher's attitude.

### 3. Results

The results showed that the pre-conceived beliefs of learners were relevant in order to ask for certain activities, i.e. collaborative, web based, etc. Motivation played a vital role in determining the needs and expectations of the learners and the questionnaires helped teachers to be conscious of the needs of students. Table 1 shows the answers of group A and B to questionnaire 1 (A= agree; D= disagree):

Table 1. Answers to questionnaire 1

Questionnaire 1- Integrative motivation	Group A	Group B
a. Role of teacher	45% A/ 55% D	85% A/ 15% D
b. Adequate English level	35% A/ 65% D	70% A/ 30% D
c. Relevance learning strategies	45% A/ 55% D	45% A/ 55% D
d. Confident in class	25% A/ 75% D	75% A/ 25% D
e. English improvement	35% A/ 65% D	90% A/ 10% D
f. Enrolment in similar class	45% A/ 55% D	90% A/ 10% D

As we can observe, students enrolled in Group B answered positively to the questions related to integrative motivation. The students felt confident and motivated in a classroom that helped them to have a positive attitude towards the target language. They could complete the activities more freely and they could plan their own learning activities. The learning strategies used in class motivated them, although we should notice that Group A felt also motivated by the learning strategies. Group A did not feel that the activities proposed motivated them to integrate the target language and considered that teachers controlled group activities, being unable to adapt the teaching activities to their needs. In Table 2 we can observe the answers to the questionnaire 2 about instrumental motivation:

Table 2. Answers to questionnaire 2

Questionnaire 2- Instrumental motivation	Group A	Group B
a. Relevance of English	75% A/ 25% D	40% A/ 60% D
b. Preference- English	80% A/ 20% D	30% A/ 40% D
c. English in profession	90% A/ 10% D	30% A/ 70% D
d. Family-friends speak English	60% A/ 40% D	40% A/ 60% D
e. English as a lingua franca	90% A/ 10% D	70% A/30% D
f. English in the Internet	90% A/ 10% D	90% A/ 10% D

As we can see in Table 2, Group A agreed to almost all the questions related to instrumental motivation. The students who enrolled in this English course wanted to improve in their future profession; henceforth their motivation was purely instrumental. Conversely, Group A was more interested in integrating other skills to learn a foreign language and this is the reason why they did not consider relevant some of the aspects of the second questionnaire. We should notice that the majority of the students of both groups considered English as a lingua franca and they used English to communicate on the Internet.

#### 4. Conclusions

While both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are essential elements of success, it is integrative motivation which has been found to sustain long-term success when learning a second language (Taylor, Meynard and Rheault, 1977; Ellis, 1994; Crookes & Schimdt, 1991). In some of the early research about motivation, integrative motivation was viewed as being of more importance in a formal learning environment than instrumental motivation (Ellis 1994). In later studies, integrative motivation has continued to be emphasised, although now the importance of instrumental motivation is also stressed. However, it is important to note that instrumental motivation has been acknowledged as a significant factor for the group of students interested in specific language learning, whereas integrative motivation is linked to general second language acquisition. It has been found that generally students select instrumental reasons more frequently than integrative reasons for the study of a specific language. In this study, the students who support an integrative approach to language study are usually motivated to a greater degree to learn a second language and overall more successful in language learning. They plan their language learning and repeat exercises that consider relevant; meanwhile the students who preferred instrumental motivation are more interested in communication than in leaning the target language.

We can observe that the learners who prefer instrumental motivation are provided with no opportunity to use the target language to communicate collaboratively and therefore, no chance to interact with members of the target group. The students who prefer integrative motivation can interact with the rest of the class and communicate in Internet with native English speakers.

Brown (2000) makes the point that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In this study, we selected activities that did not include both kinds of motivation, although this is not a desirable objective in second language learning. Learners rarely select one single form of motivation when learning a second language; they rather combine both orientations in their learning. Brown cites the example of international students residing in the United States, learning English for academic purposes while at the same time wishing to become integrated with the people and culture of the country.

As we have shown in this research, motivation is an important factor in L2 achievement. For this reason it is important to identify both the type and combination of motivation that assists in the successful acquisition of a second language. At the same time it is necessary to view motivation as one of a number of variables in an intricate model of interrelated individual and situational factors which are unique to each language learner.

No matter the underlying motivation to study a second language, what cannot be disputed is the fact that it is an important variable when examining successful second language acquisition. In this study we have just focused on evaluating motivation although we are conscious that motivation includes cognitive and metacognitive causes that should also be considered in future research.

## References

- Anderson, N.J., (2008). Metacognition and good language learners. In: C. Griffiths, (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Learners* (pp. 99-109). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernat, E. & Gvozdenko, I. (2006). Beliefs about Language Learning: Current Knowledge, Pedagogical Implications, and New Research Directions. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 9-1, 1-13.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Crookes, G. & Schmidt R. W. (1991). Motivation : Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning*, 41-4, 469-512.
- Gardner, R.C. (1982). Language attitudes and language learning. In E. Bouchard Ryan & H. Giles (Eds.), *Attitudes towards language variation* (pp. 132-147). London: Edward Arnold.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring. A new area cognitive-developmental inquiry. *American Psychologist*, 34-10, 906-911.
- Hacker, D.J., (1998). Definitions and empirical foundations. In: D.J. Hacker, J. Dunlosky & A.C. Graesser, (Eds.), *Metacognition in Educational Theory and Practice* (pp. 1-23). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Henderson, M.; Huang, H; Grant, S. & Henderson, L. (2009). Language acquisition in *Second Life*: Improving self-efficacy beliefs. *Proceedings ascilite Auckland 2009*: 464-474.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.). *Learner Strategies in Language Learning* (pp: 119-129). Cambridge: Prentice-Hall.
- Sakul, K. & Gales, S. J. (2002). Investigating Japanese learners' beliefs about language learning. *System*, 4, 473-492.
- Siskin, H. J. (Ed.) (2008). *From Thought to Action: Exploring Beliefs and Outcomes in the Foreign Language Program*. Boston: Thomson.
- Skehan, P. (1993). *Individual differences in second-language learning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Taylor, D. M., Meynard, R. & Rheault, E. (1977). Threat to ethnic identity and second-language learning. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, ethnicity and intergroup relations* (pp. 99-118). London & NY: Academic Press.
- Wenden, A. (1987). Metacognition: an expanded view of the cognitive abilities of L2 learners. *Language Learning*. 37-4, 573-597.
- Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (Eds.). (1987). *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Prentice-Hall.
- Wenden, A. L. (1998). Metacognitive knowledge and language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19-4, 515-537.
- Wenden, A. L. (1999). Commentary. An introduction to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning: beyond the basics. *System*, 27-4, 435-441.
- Wenden, A. L. (2001). Metacognitive knowledge in SLA: The neglected variable. In Breen M. P. (Ed.). *Learner contributions to language learning: new directions in research* (pp. 44-64). Harlow: Longman.