

Motivation in second and foreign language learning

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Introduction

Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved in L2 acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent. Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement. On the other hand, high motivation can make up for considerable deficiencies both in one's language aptitude and learning conditions. In their seminal work, Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasise that, although language aptitude accounts for a considerable proportion of individual variability in language learning achievement, motivational factors can override the aptitude effect. In certain language environments, as Gardner and Lambert point out, where the social setting demands it (e.g. when the L1 is a local vernacular and the L2 is the national language), many people seem to master an L2, regardless of their aptitude differences.

Because of the central importance attached to it by practitioners and researchers alike, L2 motivation has been the target of a great deal of research during the past decades. Until the 1990s this research had been largely dominated by a social psychological approach inspired by the influential work of Robert Gardner, Wallace Lambert, Richard Clément and their Canadian associates (notably Peter MacIntyre and Kim Noels) (for reviews, see Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Clément, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993a). The 1990s brought a marked shift in thought on L2 motivation as a number of researchers in various parts of the world attempted to reopen the

research agenda in order to shed new light on the subject. This renewed interest has led to a flourish of both empirical research and theorising on motivation; while this is a welcome phenomenon, the broadening of the theoretical scope has also led to the adoption of a range of new scientific terms and concepts (often taken over from mainstream motivational psychology) without sufficient discussion of their interrelationship, thus giving L2 motivation an aura of eclecticism and confusion.

In view of these new developments there appears to be a need for taking stock of what we have and where we are going in motivation research. In 1993, *Language Teaching* published a comprehensive review article on L2 motivation by Robert Gardner and Peter MacIntyre, but the considerable recent developments warrant a follow-up to this summary. The current paper takes up the review of L2 motivation research where Gardner and MacIntyre (1993a) left off, by focusing on three issues that seem to be central to understanding the present situation: (1) What is motivation? (2) What are the current motivational paradigms? Where have they 'come from'? And how do they relate to the established results in L2 motivation research? (3) What are the educational implications of L2 motivation research?

A general assumption underlying this overview is the belief that L2 motivation is a complex, multi-faceted construct, and that the diverse approaches highlight different aspects of this complexity. Thus, they do not necessarily conflict, but rather can enrich our understanding—both from a theoretical and a practical point of view—provided they are properly integrated.

1. What is motivation?

Although 'motivation' is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of this concept. Researchers seem to agree that motivation is responsible for determining human behaviour by energising it and giving it direction, but the great variety of accounts put forward in the literature of how this happens may surprise even the seasoned researcher. This diversity is, of course, no accident; as Dörnyei (1996a) points out, motivation theories in general seek to explain no less than the fundamental question of why humans behave as they do, and therefore it would be naive to assume any simple and

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Motivation In Second And Foreign Language Learning

Lingsheng Yao



Motivation In Second And Foreign Language Learning:

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