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## Rethinking Motivation

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## **Rethinking Motivation**

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Although few students at the secondary and post-secondary level enroll willingly in foreign language classes to begin with, McGroarty (1988a) writes that even fewer attain any usable level of proficiency. In Japan, students study English for six years in junior and senior high school, but few are able to speak the language. At the university level in the U.S., especially in less commonly taught language (LCTL) courses, drop-out rates of two-thirds are not uncommon over the course of the first year of foreign language study. Aida (1994) notes that college enrollment in the U.S. in Japanese language classes from 1986 to 1990 increased 94.9% to become the fifth most commonly taught language at the college level (p.155). But in consecutive semesters, she sees her sample size of second-year students drop from 96 to 54, a nearly 44% decline! These high rates of attrition continue year after year. What good are increased enrollments if few students complete the sequence necessary to meet graduation requirements, let alone gain even limited proficiency in the language? In order to understand why so many students fail to persist in their second language (L2) studies, researchers have sought answers by studying motivation.

### **Gardner's Social Psychological Model**

Gardner and Lambert (1972) proposed the social psychological theory of language learning, which dominated motivation research, with various modifications, for over 20 years. The most salient point of this

theory in the language-learning community has been the integrative-instrumental dichotomy. In this model, motivation is the learner's orientation toward the goal of L2 learning. Gardner and Lambert proposed two main orientations: *integrative motivation*, which means that the learner has positive attitudes toward the second language group and has the desire to integrate into the group or to interact with it; and *instrumental motivation*, which means that the learner wishes to learn the language for pragmatic reasons, such as passing a course or getting a better-paying job, for example. In other words, they sought to explain students' "success" in L2 learning based on their reason for being in the class in the first place.

According to Oxford and Shearin (1994), Gardner and his colleagues first "put L2 learning motivation on the map as a very important issue and provided the current theoretical underpinnings" (p.16). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) add that Gardner and Lambert's integrative-instrumental distinction "has influenced virtually all second language-related research in [the motivation] area" (p.471). They continue that Gardner and his associates' work "has been so dominant that alternative concepts have not been seriously considered" (p.501).

### **Dissent**

This is not to say that there was not dissent in the academic community regarding the social psychological theory. Oller (1981), while stating that he personally thought that "the integrative theory advocated by Gardner, Lambert, and others, is probably correct" (p.232), concluded that the appealing theory "lack [s] any truly solid empirical base" (p.234). This conclusion is based on the fact that in order to measure students' motivation, a statistical analysis is undertaken on self-reported attitudes or motivation. Such responses tend to be self-

flattering, socially acceptable, and self-consistent (p.232) and therefore unreliable.

Au (1988), in an extensive review of the literature, concluded that the hypothesis that the integrative motive is positively related to L2 achievement "was found to lack generality. Moreover, the notion that integrative motive is a unitary concept was not supported by the empirical evidence" (p.90).

McGroarty (1988a) called for further individual case study research, writing that "research on attitudes and motivation would be enriched by detailed documentation of the reasons individual learners do or do not undertake, persist, and proceed in foreign language study" (p.32). McGroarty (1988b) also noted that precise motivational factors vary according to the language studied and the instructional context. Gardner's theory developed from dealing with native English speakers learning French in Canada. The distinction between integrative and instrumental roughly mirrors the difference between studying French in French-speaking Canadian areas versus studying it in an English-speaking province.

### **New Directions**

In the 1990s, new interest arose in the study of motivation. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) noted that motivation is not the subject of extensive investigation in applied linguistics, and that in second-language acquisition (SLA) theory, "motivation is typically grouped together with various aspects of personality and emotion as miscellaneous affective factors that *may* play a role in acquisition" (p.470). They also suggested that the current L2 discussion on motivation "lacks validity in that it is not well-grounded in the real world domain of the [L2] classroom, nor is it well-connected to other related educational research" (p.470).

Crookes and Schmidt advocated a broader view of motivation and contended that "it seems reasonable that motivation, as it controls engagement in and persistence with the learning task, should also be considered worthy of renewed scrutiny" (p.480). They called for addressing motivation from the perspective of classroom teachers, rather than from a sociological perspective. Rather than looking at *why* students were studying a language, they defined motivation in terms of choice, engagement, and persistence, as determined by interest in the L2, its relevance to students' needs, the expectancy of success or failure, and the effect outcomes have on students' study (p.502).

They also called for research into whether there are conditions under which motivation for L2 learning increases or decreases. As to whether there are conditions under which motivation for L2 learning does increase or decrease, they stated that only speculation is possible concerning the answer (p.501). They also asked if circumstances can be arranged to cause motivation to arise or to be extinguished, noting that investigators would be hard pressed to answer that question also (p.500).

Oxford and Shearin (1994), while praising the work of Gardner, explained that, rather than just integrative and instrumental motivation orientations for studying a second language, a study they conducted of 218 high school students of Japanese identified twenty distinguishable initial motivation categories (p.12). They then proposed an expanded model of L2 learning motivation drawn from social, general, industrial, educational, cognitive developmental, and sociocultural psychology. They, too, focused on motivation within the classroom and offered practical implications for identifying, shaping, and reinforcing student motivation.

Dörnyei (1994a) stated that there are many reasons for people to

learn languages and that they do not fit cleanly into the integrative-instrumental framework. He suggested a detailed and ambitious model of motivation, which he described as no more than a theoretical possibility because of lack of verification of many of the components (p.283). The model consists of three levels: the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level, which represents the L2 learning environment. The third level, the L2 learning environment level, contains three sub-levels: course-specific, teacher-specific, and group-specific motivational components. It is important to note the focus in level three on the dynamics of the individual classroom.

Gardner and Tremblay (1994) were obviously threatened by these three articles by Crookes and Schmidt (1991), Oxford and Shearin (1994), and Dörnyei (1994a), and with the way they felt the articles rejected their work in the area of motivation research. The Dörnyei article in particular may have caught their attention since he had previously worked with Gardner's colleagues and collaborators in other quantitative studies. Gardner and Tremblay wrote a response article specifically addressing the points raised in the three articles. They wondered whether criticism of their focus in motivation research was a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Oxford (1994), in a response article to Gardner and Tremblay, while reiterating the debt owed to their pioneering work, noted that a shift in motivation theory and research was taking place. She postulated that up until recently, the language-learning field had not been ready to deal with language learning motivation theories that were not based on social psychology, but that now it was ready to do so (p.513). Let us hope that she is right.

## **An End to Instrumental-Integrative Primacy**

The result of the new directions in motivation research is a change in how integrative and instrumental orientations are viewed as well as how they are valued. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) wrote that the old conception of motivation as either integrative or instrumental orientations is "too static and restricted" (p. 4). Gardner and Tremblay (1994a) stated "motivation is dynamic in that it involves a sequence of events, influences, or responses" (p.526). Dörnyei (1994b) noted that the integrative-instrumental myth has prevailed in the L2 profession, though not in the Gardnerian theory (p.520). Oxford and Shearin (1994) added that "Gardner no longer treats the primacy of integrative motivation as essential or meaningful...but many people in the language field do not realize this yet" (p.13). Gardner and Tremblay (1994b) pointed out that integrative and instrumental motivation are often positively related, but that they are not the only components of L2 motivation (p.360). Dörnyei (1994b) cited his study, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994), which found the integrative motive associated with several orientations, including one they identified as "instrumental-knowledge," and went on to state they hoped it would help "put an end to the misleading use of the simplistic integrative-instrumental dichotomy" (p.520).

## **Conclusion**

The concept of motivation is indeed a complex issue. There is still little agreement on how to define and research motivation. The new directions begun in the last ten years, though, offer hope. Unfortunately, many in the academic community have failed to take notice of the shift and continue to adhere to the "integrative-instrumental myth," as Dörnyei (1994b) labels it.

Rather than relying on statistical analysis of why students are studying a second or foreign language and using that to predict success, we need to focus on the dynamics of the classroom. It is arrogant to proclaim that we should mold students to make them more successful in our courses rather than looking at our programs and our classes and adjusting them to aid students in succeeding. What in students' actual experience with learning a language causes them to persist in their studies and gain competency in the language?

A particularly fertile area of investigation should be research into change in motivation, as suggested by Crookes and Schmidt (1991). When attrition rates of up to two-thirds over the course of a year are not uncommon in some language programs, something is affecting the motivation of students, no matter what their initial reason was for choosing to study a particular foreign language. It is not sufficient to just blame students who discontinue or are otherwise unsuccessful as poor students. What is it about some classes that leads to decreased student motivation and higher attrition, while other classes create students eager to learn and persist in their studies? What happens in the classroom that can change positive to negative or negative to positive? The old theory of motivation could not adequately address such questions. Perhaps the new directions will fare better.

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