Motivating Learners and the Importance of Materials Used in Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The motivation of the learner is one of the most important factors in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), meanwhile language teaching materials are having a very important effect and role in language learning and teaching activities. This research focuses on how different materials motivate students. Many factors which affect student's motivation towards teaching materials were perceived, such as interest in the subject matter, level of difficulty, relevance to existing knowledge, perception of usefulness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Virtually all students are motivated in one way or another. One student may be keenly interested in classroom subject matter and seek out challenging course work, participate actively in class discussions, and earn high marks on assigned projects. Another student may be more concerned with the social side of school, interacting with classmates frequently, attending extracurricular activities almost every day, and perhaps running for a student government office. Still another may be focused on athletics, excelling in physical education classes, playing or watching sports most afternoons and weekends, and faithfully following a physical fitness regimen. Yet another student—perhaps because of an undetected learning disability, a shy temperament, or a seemingly uncoordinated body—may be motivated to *avoid* academics, social situations, or athletic activities. Motivation leads to increased effort and energy. Motivation increases the amount of effort and energy that learners expend in activities directly related to their needs and goals. It determines whether they pursue a task enthusiastically and wholeheartedly or apathetically and lackadaisically. Motivation increases initiation of and persistence in activities. Learners are more likely to begin a task they actually want to do. They are also more likely to continue working at it until they have completed it, even if they are occasionally interrupted or frustrated in the process (Larson, 2000; Maehr, 1984; Wigfield, 1994). In general, then, motivation increases students' time on task, an important factor affecting their learning and achievement. It affects cognitive processes and affects what learners pay attention to and how effectively they process it (Eccles & Wigfield, 1985; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Pugh & Bergin, 2006). For instance, motivated learners often make a concerted effort to truly understand classroom material—to learn it meaningfully—and consider how they might use it in their own lives. It also determines which consequences are reinforcing and punishing. The more learners are motivated to achieve academic success, the more they will be proud of an A and upset by a low grade. The more learners want to be accepted and respected by peers, the more they will value membership in the “in” group and be distressed by the ridicule of classmates. Motivation often enhances performance. Because of the other effects just identified—goal-directed behavior, effort and energy, initiation and persistence, cognitive processing, and the impact of consequences—motivation often leads to improved performance. As

you might guess, then, students who are most motivated to learn and excel in classroom activities tend to be our highest achievers (A. E. Gottfried, 1990; Schiefele, Krapp, & Winteler, 1992; Walberg & Uguroglu, 1980). Conversely, students who have little interest in academic achievement are at high risk for dropping out before they graduate from high school (Hardré & Reeve, 2003; Hymel et al., 1996; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997).

Success in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) depends on a variety of factors such as the amount of exposure to the natural target language practice, the duration and intensity of the language course, and last but not least, the characteristics of the language learner. Motivation—one element of the learner characteristics is one of the most important factors in the field. Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) contended that motivation is the key learner variable and nothing much happens without it. It determines the degree of effort learners put into foreign or second language learning. The more motivation they may have, the more effort they tend to put into learning the language. Therefore, teachers' biggest concern is always whether students are well motivated and willing to learn what they teach. According to Wachob (2006), teaching materials undergird the construct of motivation. Seven and Engin (2007) also stressed, language teaching materials are having a very important effect and role in language learning and teaching activities. It showed that motivation can come from teaching materials. Therefore, since no research can cover the rather extensive motivational variables this paper tried to focus on how different materials motivate students.

2. THEORETICAL SUBSTRUCTURE

The last four decades have witnessed a considerable amount of research that investigates the nature and role of motivation in SLA process. Gardner & Lambert (1972) pioneered on motivation, proposing an integrative-instrumental duality, which became widely accepted and confirmed by a number of studies. Their ten-year-long research program in which they found that success in language attainment was dependent on learners' affective reactions toward the target linguistic-cultural group, gave validity to the study of motivation in SLA.

Some studies have attempted to extend Gardner's construct by adding new components, such as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, intellectual curiosity, attribution about past successes/failures, need for achievement, self-confidence and other situation-specific variables such as classroom events and tasks, classroom climate and group cohesion, course content and teaching materials, teacher feedback, and grades and rewards. In the 1980s the learning situation itself received more attention and three sets of motivational components were identified by Dörnyei (1994): i) course-specific motivational components; ii) teacher-specific motivational components; iii) group-specific motivational components. The course-specific motivational components relate to the class syllabus, the materials used, the teaching method, and the learning task. Dörnyei uses the conditions presented by Keller (1983) and later by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) to describe these conditions: Interest, Relevance, Expectancy, and Satisfaction.

The first category, interest, is related to intrinsic motivation and is centred on the individual's inherent curiosity and desire to know more about him or herself and his or her environment. The second, relevance, is a prerequisite for "sustained motivation and requires the learner to perceive that important personal needs are being met by the learning situation" (Keller, 1983: 406). It refers to the extent to which the student feels that the instruction is connected to important personal needs, values, or goals. At a macrolevel, this component coincides with instrumentality; at the level of the learning situation, it refers to the extent to which the classroom instruction and course content are seen to be conducive to achieving the goal, that is, to mastering the L2. Expectancy refers to the perceived likelihood of success and is related to the learner's self-confidence and self-efficacy at a general level; at the level of the learning situation, it concerns perceived material difficulty, the amount of effort required, the amount of available assistance and guidance, the teacher's presentation of the material, and familiarity with the task type. Satisfaction concerns the outcome of an activity, referring to the combination of extrinsic rewards such as enjoyment and pride. There is that determinant of motivation which is perhaps the most traditional: reward, punishment or outcomes. Activities for which the motivating forces are outcomes have been referred to as

extrinsically motivated, as opposed to those which are intrinsically motivated (Deci, 1975). This framework appears to be particularly useful in describing course-specific motives. Thus my research will be based on Dornyei's motivation construct to explore through what ways teaching materials affect students' enthusiasm of language learning.

2.1. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Guariento & Morley (2001) stated that extracting real information from a real text in a new/different language can be extremely motivating, therefore increasing students' motivation for learning by exposing them to 'real' language. In addition, authentic materials also give the reader the opportunity to gain real information and know what is going on in the world around them. Authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people (Nuttall, 1996). Thus,

Nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic (Widdowson, 1990). Nuttall (1996) gives three main criteria when choosing texts to be used in the classroom: suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Suitability of content means the reading material should interest the students as well as be relevant to their needs. Exploitability refers to how the text can be used to develop the students' competence as readers. A text that can not be exploited for teaching purposes has no use in the classroom. Readability is used to describe the combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text, as well as referring to the amount of new vocabulary and any new grammatical forms present.

Kawai (2000) pointed out, from a constructivist perspective, content relevance of learning materials to the learner's existing knowledge is a key ingredient for intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) create the construct of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theory. Intrinsic motivation concerns behavior performed for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity. It is a state where the relevance for the learner of the content of the material is the main reason for learning.

As Brozo (2005) concluded in order to foster intrinsic motivation, teacher should try to create learning activities that are relevant to students' lives. One of effective strategies is connecting the subject with your students' culture, outside interests or social lives.

As Crookes and Schmidt (1991) pointed out a program which appears to meet the students' own expressed needs will be more motivating, more efficient, and thus more successful. Cunningsworth (1984) also stressed that the materials should meet students' needs: "Students particularly more sophisticated adults need to feel that the materials from which they are learning have to be connected with the real world and at the same time they must be related positively to the aspects of their inner make up such as age, level of education, social attitudes, the intellectual ability and level of emotional maturity."

3. CONCLUSION

This paper tried to induce the importance and effects of teaching materials in language learning. Many factors affect student's motivation towards teaching materials: interest in the subject matter, level of difficulty, relevance to existing knowledge, perception of usefulness. These findings are consistent with motivation construct identified by Dornyei (1994). Reviewed above, the level of difficulty will be a good determinant of selective learner attention. What's more, personal relevance makes an enormous difference in students' attitudes toward learning. Finally, visual material and authentic material will arouse students' interest and enthusiasm.

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