USING MOTIVATION IN THE INSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR STEM AND ECONOMIC SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BULGARIAN LEARNERS

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Abstract. Instructors who make efforts in creating a class that is interesting by establishing good rapport with the students, with a pleasant experience will change their future orientation towards English learning by applying it how careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and business will provide them with a secure job and future. We observed that student learning a second language must be purposeful and have a real relevancy to them.

Keywords: teaching methodology, language learning, teaching pedagogy

In teaching a new language, motivation is one of the biggest challenges that teachers encounter, capturing and holding their students' attention and interest. From your first meeting they seemed enthusiastic: they are curious

about the new language and its culture. Despite this initial spurt of energy, however, within a week, their interest wanes: they come unprepared for class presentations; during class, they do not participate in discussions; they talked among each other, do homework for other classes or play or send messages on their cell phones.

Puzzled by this behavior, we decided to explore motivation as a tool for the classroom. We studied one of the top academic schools in Bulgaria to query some of the best students on motivation. These students were queried in their final semester in high school. They were hard-working and ambitious. How could their indifference towards class be explained? Was it something that their teachers are doing or not doing? The investigators examined factors focused on how the classroom can be more effective in teaching English.

Motivation is the second strongest predictor of success in learning, trailing only aptitude (O'Neil, 2018; Gass & Selinger, 2008). Dörnyei & Csizér (2002) point out that motivation is a complex phenomenon involving several diverse sources and conditions. Some of these sources stem from the learners' micro-context in the immediate learning environment. This includes the role of the parents, teachers, school, and peers. Other sources stem from the macro-context, includes societal processes that may have an influence on learners' attitudes towards the target language community and culture. Dörnyei & Csizér (2005) speak of motivation as the relationship between the learner's 'ideal self' (aspired attributes and skills), 'ought-to self' (the attributes and skills one 'ought' to possess) and second language (L2) proficiency.

Lightbown & Spada (2006), define motivation in terms of (a) learners' communicative needs and (b) learners' attitudes towards the target language community and culture. If learners need the second language (L2) to communicate – as it is often the case in second Language accession (SLA) contexts – they are more motivated to learn it. Respectively, if learners have positive feelings towards the target language community and its speakers, they are

more inclined to put more effort in learning the language. The former factor, learners' communicative needs, was absent from my teaching equation by the mere nature of the class. Our students studied English as a foreign language. Except for their exposure to pop culture, such as movies, music, and the internet (most of which is subtitled, dubbed, or available in Bulgarian translation), and of course, to their teacher, they have no other contact (or need for contact) with English speakers. For the purposes of our teaching analysis, therefore, we consider their immediate communicative needs (or rather, the lack of) outside the classroom to have a negative effect on their motivation levels.

The second factor, learners' attitudes towards the target language community and culture, has received a lot of attention in SLA literature. Norton (2000) uses the term *motivational investment*: the "socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often-ambivalent desire to learn and practice it". In his framework for L2 motivation, Dörnyei (2001) uses the term *integrativeness* to refer to a positive outlook on the L2 language community and culture, and *instrumentality* to refer to the perceived usefulness of the L2 for learners' future goals, such as acceptance into English-speaking higher institutions and employment opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) and business related careers.

What was our students' outlook towards the English language, its language community and culture? If we had to use only one word as an answer, we would say "conflicted" at best. Their ratings on instrumentality were quite high: they felt that English was useful because its status as a world language. However, even this usefulness was not very clear to them. After all, they were majoring in German language, and their immediate future choices were already shaped by their major. Most of them had been accepted to universities in Bulgaria or Germany (Fieldnotes, week 1). English, therefore, was not important for their imminent future. Age could be another reason why instru-

mentality was not clear to them. Kormos & Csizér (2008) reports that adult learners have a much clearer picture of how the L2 can be useful to them in the future, whereas adolescent learners do not, since they are still in the process of deciding about their future and have no clear picture of it yet.

In terms of integrativeness, the picture was even more complicated. Part of the complexity stems from their limited perception of 'English language community and culture' as British or American culture, and the mixed feelings that are associated with these cultures. For the most part there is a love-hate relationship there. On the one hand, students are attracted to the Hollywood image of the UK and USA: movies, cars, glamour. This finding agrees with Dincer (2018), Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, (2017), Hollenbeck & Hristova-Hollenbeck (2008), Kormas (2008) and Dörnyei & Csizér (2002), who report that adolescents' interest in English language products is a strong factor affecting motivation. On the other hand, they see both countries as ruthless imperialistic powers, 'bullies' that are out to annihilate small countries like Bulgaria. In their study of Hungarian high school students' attitudes towards various target languages, Dörnyei & Csizér (2002) found that English, due to its association with globalization, is also associated with the elimination of linguistic and cultural diversity. On many occasions we found students' statements to reflect a similar tension between cultural attraction and fear of loss of identity. Replies such as "not everybody does things like the Americans do", "this is Bulgaria, this is how we do things here", and "it may be so, but Bulgaria is still the best place to live" were very common in our interactions.

The learners' microcontext, or immediate learning environment, emphasizes the role that parents, teachers, school and pears play in learners' motivation. Dörnyei (2001) views parents as the "major intermediary between the cultural milieu and the student". Parents can play an active role in learners' motivation through encouragement, support, and monitoring, as well as a pas-

sive role through indirect modeling and communicating of attitudes related to L2 learning and culture. Dörnyei (2001) points out that when these two roles are not in harmony, then the passive role is much more potent in shaping the learner's motivation. I found this to be true on many occasions. With very few exceptions, my students' parents were very involved in their child's education: they were very proud that their child got into such a selective school and that they receive such an intensive language instruction. They were actively supportive of L2 learning. The passive influence, however, was very strong as well. On many occasions, students expressed contempt towards the school and doubted the value of classes (including English classes) by quoting a parent. A parent's economic success without such education was also a very common example brought up by students.

It was clear to the investigators that some of the models and examples our students were being exposed to at home were contradicting what they were learning in school, more specifically in our classes. A good example is the case of a student who made a point in ignoring my instructions in class and refused to reply to my questions. The student came to me after class and asked me how I feel being an American now that "America is losing its power and that Russia is becoming the next world power". He then proceeded telling me about the top government positions in the US being held by Jews and Masons. Trying to camouflage my shock and gain time to come up with a proper reply, I asked what his source of information as. The reply was "my father".

The role of the school, both as a place and as a system has been explored by Kormos (2008) who reports that teacher-centered education produces learners who are not independent, expect the teacher to provide the knowledge, and are least motivated in finding ways to strengthen their L2 learning experience. The compulsory nature of the class was a bad enough start. My students were not there because they wanted to learn English: they were there because they had to. Their first foreign language of choice was

German, they were good at it, only a few months from graduating, and English was a mere annoyance. Kormos also warns that over-reliance on extrinsic motives, such as exams and grades tend to inhibit the growth of intrinsic interest in L2 learning.

Studies on the motivational profiles of adolescents (Dincer, 2018; O'Neill, 2018; Kormos et al., 2008; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002) point out the influence that the group dynamic has on individual learners' motivation. Learners that belong in groups that have a strong collective motivation, are collaborative and supportive, are more motivated individually as well. On the other hand, when learners feel threatened and afraid of "losing face", they tend to give up hope and lose interest in learning. Several of my students came to me literally begging to do a 'private' presentation just to me, in fear that will get laughed at for their pronunciation or grammar mistakes in front of the class. A couple of students plainly refused to give a presentation for the same reasons and demanded a written test instead. One student asked me never to address him in class "because they will laugh" (Fieldnotes, week 2). No matter how much I tried to reassure this student that I would not allow his classmates such behavior, I could not convince him.

Final consideration in SLA is the role that the teacher plays in motivating students. Literature findings (Dincer, 2018; O'Neil, 2018; Hollenbeck & Hristova-Hollenbeck, 2008; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Kormos et al., 2008; Dörnyei, 2001; Ellis, 2008; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002) stress the importance of past instruction experience on learners' motivation. Students that have had stable, consistent instruction will do well in learning, according to interviews, classes that have had inconsistent instruction did poorly on SLA exam performance compared to students that had consistent instruction.

Dörnyei (2001) argues that teachers are the most significant variable affecting pupils' attitudes towards L2 learning. He argues that teachers can

and should use their personality, competence, and active socializing practices to make a positive impact on learners' attitudes.

Dörnyei's "ten commandments for motivating language learners" (2001) are: (i) set a personal example with your own behavior; (ii) create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in classroom; (iii) present tasks properly; (iv) develop a good relationship with the learners; (v) increase the learner's linguistic self-confidence; (vi) make the language classes interesting; (vii) promote learner autonomy; (viii) personalize the learning process; (ix) increase the learners' goal-orientedness; (x) familiarize learners with the target language culture

How did the investigation do? In items i-iv, vi and x we fared quite well. Very early on we realized that any kind of personal information that I provided drew my students' interest. I noticed personal stories that could be shared with students would "pique" their interests. Examples from school, work, professional connections and applications would get their attention. Students were motivated by conversations and readings that were career related and relevant to them.

Per Hollenbeck & Hristova-Hollenbeck (2008) and Kormos & Csizér, (2008). suggestions, we spent the very first meeting solely on finding out what the students liked, what they did not like, what they expected from this class and how they thought it might benefit them in the future. We asked them to submit topics for discussion to me on a piece of paper so that they could be anonymous, therefore honest. We then planned class discussion based on these topics.

We spent a class talking about presentation skills and their importance in every aspect of life: formal speeches, interviews, story-telling, among many more. They agreed that presentation skills are not an "English-only" or "classroom-only" skill and that as such, it would be useful to learn. We gave them the option to present on any topic they like.

The overall experience with the students' motivation confirms the view that motivation is a temporal, situation-specific, and ever-changing variable in L2 learning. In teaching I the students' motivation levels change from one class to the next. Problems at home, poor sleep, a bad hair day, an exam in another class, anything could influence students' interest in my class. The adoption of an optimistic approach, reciting "if it can change, it can be changed by you". Instructors who make efforts in creating a class that is interesting by establishing good rapport with the students, with a pleasant experience will change their future orientation towards English learning by applying it how careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and business will provide them with a secure job and future. We observed that student learning a second language must be purposeful and have a real relevancy to them.

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