

Research on Motivation for Learning English As a Foreign Language — A Project in Progress

Jelena Mihaljević
Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb

When asked to describe their motivation for learning English as a foreign language, Yugoslav learners in this study offered motives of various types. These differed from the instrumental-integrative dichotomy established by Lambert and Gardner. The motives of the Yugoslav learners referred to the role of English in the modern world, to the characteristics of the English language as such, and to the teaching setting. Some of these motives were found to differ significantly in frequency with age and the socio-cultural background of the learner.

Introduction

It seems that the fact that, to most people, the importance of motivation for learning is self-evident and thus taken for granted may be one of the reasons why we still lack a detailed understanding of what motivation is or what its subcomponents are. Since the 1972 classical study of attitudes and motivation in second language learning by Lambert and Gardner, many other studies of the phenomenon have been carried out. Still it seems that their findings may not be directly applicable to all learning situations. Most of the research done so far has been done in second language settings, and even there the results seem to vary from setting to setting. Thus the finding by Lambert and Gardner that integrative motivation is necessarily needed for successful learning was called into question by, on the one hand, findings that instrumental motivation was connected with higher achievement (Lukmani, 1972) and, on the other hand, by studies that failed to make the distinction at all (Burstall, 1974; Ostojić, 1980).

One cannot but agree with Gardner's recent claim that "equating the individual who develops bilingual proficiency in the home or the street with the one who develops such skill in a formal school context is meaningless. This is not meant to imply that the processes are necessarily different, but simply that the contexts are different, and thus different variables can come into play." (1985:4). In second language settings language

programmes usually require students to make the other language part of their behavioural repertoire and thus it seems reasonable to hypothesize that attitudes towards the other linguistic group will influence the relative degree of success with which this can be achieved. In foreign language settings the programme is often focussed more on the cognitive aspects of language and it seems possible that attitudes towards the other linguistic group would be involved to a lesser degree.

Schumann (1975) points out that, in contrast with language learning through direct exposure to the target language environment, in the formal instruction setting characterizing the foreign language context, intelligence and aptitude appear to have the greatest influence. This is so because classroom instruction tends to focus on academic skills (grammar, translation, rote memorization of vocabulary, etc) which more directly tap the abilities associated with these two characteristics.

There seem to be two basic reasons why investigation of motivation in foreign language settings has to include the teaching variable in all its aspects. First, since the classroom is the main (sometimes the only) source of the learner's exposure to the language, the elements making up the teaching setting (teacher, techniques, materials, etc) acquire great importance and may exert very great influence on learners' attitudes and motivation. Second, as Stern (1983) points out, of all the determinants impinging on language learning it is the educational treatment that can most readily be modified and adjusted to different social and language environments and to individual learner factors.

In his study of the psychological factors in learning English as a foreign language in Bosnia, Ostojić (1980) found that primary and secondary school students there were highly motivated for learning. Unfortunately, the results they were achieving were not as high as might be inferred from their degree of motivation. Ostojić concluded that the educational treatment in schools did not make full use of the learners' motivational potential and, in some situations, it even exerted a negative effect on learning motivation. This also points to the special importance of the educational treatment.

Sample

In order to be able to compose questionnaires on motivation that would include really relevant items the author went to a couple of schools and asked students to describe and explain their reasons for learning or for not being willing to learn English. The author was introduced to each class by their teacher, who left the classroom immediately after the introduction. Then she explained why she had come, stressing the importance of getting sincere answers. It was also pointed out that no one from the school would be shown the papers. The students were also informed that they did not have to put their names down. Some primary school children seemed to be intrigued by the anonymity and put down their names anyway or commented on how sincere they had been in, for example, the following way: "These are the true reasons - I don't have to lie to you because you don't know who I am anyway".

The sample included three age groups: primary, secondary and adult learners of English. One of the reasons for making this distinction is quite practical: the Yugoslav

education system is divided into the three categories and they are, of course, inter-related with age. In all, 583 students were questioned, from eight different schools and institutions. As motivation for learning a foreign language is also a social (sociological) category, two types of primary and secondary schools, geographically and socially speaking, were included: schools from Zagreb – representing a metropolitan context, and schools from Grubišno Polje – representing a small town context. The aim was to see if the social setting was a significant factor.

The study is supposed to be an exploratory one, so the analysis of the subjects' replies was not aimed at establishing how many learners were, for example, instrumentally or integratively motivated for learning English. The analysis was directed by the types of answers obtained: the replies themselves determined which categories were to be established.

Two phenomena were looked into: motivation and lack of motivation. The answers were meant to point to the different factors that may play a role in the motivation for learning English as a foreign language in this setting.

One of the premises the analysis was based on was that one student needn't have only one reason for learning or even one type of reason. A great majority of replies confirms this belief. This means that the reply of a given student was put into more than one category, according to how many reasons for learning he had mentioned.

Analysis

MOTIVATION

The subjects' replies lent themselves to nine categories. Both the number and the names of the categories are provisional and tentative. They do not reflect any one established categorization and are invented by the author. Some of the categories may be overlapping and the number may, later on as the project develops, be reduced. This provisional number is retained because it seems to better reflect the subjects' own perception of their motivations.

Category 1: reflecting the importance of English as a *world language*.

Answers such as "I learn English because it is the world No. 1 language", "It's the official language in many countries" and the like were put into this category. Some of these answers may be implying things covered by other categories but they are kept in a separate category because these implications were not stated by the subjects. In this way we keep record of the degree of vagueness characterising a subject's awareness and perception of his own motivation. From the practical point of view it may be very relevant to the teacher to know how vague or definite her students' motives for learning are.

Category 2: the *cultural* motive.

This category covers a whole variety of answers stressing that knowing English widens people's horizons, raises their general knowledge, enables them to learn something new, to get acquainted with English-speaking countries and become "part of the world". Some subjects stress the possibility of getting integrated into the world – this type of

integration is, surely, different from the integrative motive in Lambert and Gardner's studies: it refers to a global, international integration rather than to integration into any one specific socio-cultural group.

Category 3: the *affiliation* motive.

This concept covers answers reflecting a general desire for wider social contacts either abroad (and not only in English-speaking countries) or with foreigners visiting Yugoslavia. All the answers imply the communicative potential of English. In contrast with Category 2, these answers are more English-specific.

Category 4: reflecting *future benefits* of knowing English.

"I learn English because I believe it will be very useful in my future life", "I need English to be able to become a pilot", "I want to go and visit my relatives in the U.S." - these are some of the typical answers included in this category. All these would probably be covered by the instrumental type in the Lambert and Gardner dichotomy.

Category 5: arising from the possibility of *using English at present*.

Many subjects state that they learn English because this enables them to understand pop songs, films (TV, cinema), to read magazines and books in English, to use computers and to be able to understand foreigners they often meet in their daily life. Most stress the feeling of satisfaction at being able to put even a limited knowledge to use in practical life situations.

One instinctively feels it may be useful to distinguish between the practical usefulness of knowing English covered by Category 4 and the immediate usefulness covered by Category 5. It would be very interesting to see how each correlates with achievement in English.

Category 6: the *forced* motivation.

Learning in order to avoid a bad mark or not to fail an exam, learning because "I have to" or because the parents insist or even exert pressure on the subject describes this category. It also refers to those who only want to avoid being ridiculed by their peers or the teacher for not being able to give correct answers.

Category 7: the *affective* motive.

This category reflects the subject's being attached to some aspect of the language. Subjects state that they learn English because they find it beautiful, melodious, nice-sounding, simple, interesting etc.

Category 8: the *integrative* motive.

This category refers to the wish to get integrated into a particular English-speaking socio-cultural group (the U.S., Canada or Australia).

Category 9: arising from *teaching methodology*.

This category covers motives arising from the quality of teaching, the teacher's personality and the materials (textbooks) used in class. The fact that the sample showed rather low frequency of this category contrasts with the fact that, in the subjects' opinion, the most frequent cause of their lack of motivation for learning English has to do with the teacher, the materials and the teaching strategy. It is also interesting to note that this category doesn't appear in the sample of subjects who learn English in institutions outside the official education system: they attend courses they pay for themselves and come with already quite strong motivation whose source is not in the classroom. Those

who get a lot of motivation from the teaching methodology often stress that an English lesson is quite unlike any other school subject and that it almost comes to them as a break from the rest of their school obligations.

Another interesting observation here is that subjects are rather general in describing the good sides of the teaching process and much more precise and clear about the negative sides they may notice. One possible explanation is that the negative aspects exert a stronger influence on their motivation than the positive ones. It is also possible to conclude that, perhaps, students take the good sides for granted and do not bother to think about or analyze them.

LACK OF MOTIVATION

The subjects were also asked to explain why they did not learn or did not like learning English, if that was the case. Their explanations were put into four categories.

Category 10: reflecting the perception of *usefulness*.

Some subjects do not learn English because they do not think it would ever be of any use to them. Some state that they should be given a chance to learn another foreign language, for example German, which would be more useful to them.

Category 11: reflecting some *personality traits* of the learner.

This category covers answers like: "I am simply too lazy to learn", "I don't like doing things that others tell me to do" etc.

Category 12: referring to some *aspects of the language*.

Some subjects refuse to learn English because they do not like the way it sounds, they think its grammar is too complicated etc.

Category 13: referring to the *teaching setting*.

Explanations covered by this category are very interesting for a couple of reasons. First, it is amazing to see how much aware of the "bad" things a pupil may be. An analysis of this category also provides a wealth of material to draw from when looking for elements in the teaching setting that might influence one's motivation for learning.

There are various elements that learners feel it necessary to point to. Most of the comments are from secondary school students. This is hardly surprising: they are not only older and more mature and able to see and rationalize more things, but they also have the basis for making comparisons (their primary school experiences). The primary school pupils' comments all refer to the teacher only. They either think their teacher is too strict or too lenient or have a feeling their teacher does not like them for some strange reason.

Secondary school students often mention that their teacher has a bad relationship with the students, that s/he is irresponsible or not motivated for the job, that s/he pronounces English badly, or is biased when evaluating the students' knowledge. Some learners feel their teacher underestimates those who are not very good at English.

A misunderstanding seems to exist between some learners and their teacher about the cause of their lack of knowledge: "My teacher keeps saying I am lazy, but in fact I work hard and really have a problem with memorising". Attribution theory has pointed out that attribution of responsibility guides subsequent behaviour. Weiner and Kukla

(1970) have demonstrated that teachers tended to punish those failing to work hard enough to fulfil their potential. On the other hand, it has also been demonstrated that individuals who are not very ambitious tend to ascribe failure to lack of ability, which is not directly under their control. A number of studies have pointed out the importance of the attitude of the teacher to the learner on the learner's achievement. Spolsky states that teacher expectations have been shown to make a great deal of difference to student success. All this highlights the complexity of motivation.

It is also very interesting to note that some students think it is up to the teacher to create and shape the learner's motivation for learning. So a lack of motivation on the part of the learner is the teacher's responsibility.

Those who attribute their lack of motivation to bad teaching methods stress that these methods of teaching are inadequate and "wrong" and that students are given very few opportunities to communicate, which they believe should be the primary goal of English lessons. Uninspiring work on texts, too much translation and lots of repetition make the lessons uninteresting.

Students also seem to have strong feelings about the teaching materials they study from. These students all belong to the secondary school age group. It may not only be that teenagers in general feel very critical about most things; if we bear in mind that there may be a tendency to feel attached to various aspects of English and that such students may favour learning for immediate use, it is to be expected that the teaching materials may have a high influence on their motivation.

Another frequently stated cause of lack of motivation with secondary school students is the very low pre-knowledge with which they enter secondary school. Many students state that they like English very much, that they think they will need it in their future life and would really like to learn it but they simply do not know where to start. They seem to lack so much knowledge that to them English looks like an insurmountable mass. This results in classroom anxiety.

One of the crucial variables in any learning situation is certainly the level of aspiration. According to Kurt Lewin's "Field Theory", motivation would depend on two evaluations: valence (importance of success on the task) and a person's estimate of his likelihood of succeeding on the task.

Some students attribute their lack of motivation for learning to a lack of success in English. This seems to confirm Clare Burstall's statement "Nothing succeeds like success". A lack of success in early learning experiences may lead to a lack of motivation.

Results and Discussion

A Chi-square test of significance of difference was run on the frequency counts for each category. The aim was to see whether the frequency of the motivation categories showed any statistically significant differences in the three age groups and the two socio-cultural settings of learners. The test results are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

table 1
Chi-square on frequency counts for the three age groups

| CATEGORY | AGE GROUP | | | CHI-SQUARE | D.F. | SIGNIFICANCE |
|----------|-----------|-------|-------|------------|------|--------------|
| | P | S | A | | | |
| 1 | 20.1% | 7.7% | 21.6% | .72929 | 2 | .6944 |
| 2 | 13.5% | 17.7% | 41.2% | 21.89880 | 2 | .0000 |
| 3 | 35.7% | 36.4% | 56.9% | 8.58703 | 2 | .0137 |
| 4 | 42.6% | 46.6% | 58.8% | 4.54321 | 2 | .1031 |
| 5 | 16.0% | 34.6% | 43.1% | 29.69424 | 2 | .0000 |
| 6 | 12.3% | 20.8% | 7.8% | 9.91724 | 2 | .0070 |
| 7 | 46.7% | 36.0% | 15.7% | 18.83587 | 2 | .0001 |
| 8 | 2.9% | .7% | .0% | 4.88082 | 2 | .0871 |
| 9 | 5.7% | 3.2% | 3.9% | 2.09305 | 2 | .3512 |
| 10 | 1.2% | 2.1% | .0% | 1.56280 | 2 | .4578 |
| 11 | 5.3% | 8.1% | .0% | 5.47332 | 2 | .0648 |
| 12 | 9.8% | 7.8% | .0% | 5.59724 | 2 | .0609 |
| 13 | 7.8% | 30.4% | 11.8% | 45.13397 | 2 | .0000 |

P - primary school, S - secondary school, A - adult, D.F. - degree of freedom

Statistically significant differences appeared in Categories 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 13, with age as the independent variable.

Categories 2, 3 and 5, which may be taken as referring to the motives for learning English which reflect its usefulness in relation to the outside world, are the most frequent in the adult group and the least frequent in the youngest group. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the maturity which comes with age is usually accompanied by becoming aware of the many advantages knowledge may offer.

Being forced to learn English as a motive was the most frequent, not surprisingly, in the adolescent group. Adolescence is considered by many to be a critical period for learning.

It seems that learners in primary school do not yet have to cope with so much material that they would have to put in a lot of effort - the way English is taught at that age implies that most things are learnt *in* school. The adult group, as may have been expected, rarely stated this motive.

Feeling attached to some aspect of the English language was significantly more frequent in the primary school group, and the attachment declined with age. The

affective relation to the foreign language itself, as Stern (1983) also points out, still lacks analysis and explanation.

The teaching setting is the most frequent demotivator in the adolescent group. In contrast to the primary school group, adolescents have a model to compare the teaching setting to and thus may be inclined to be more critical. Adults also have a reference against which to judge the teaching setting.

table 2
Chi-square on frequency counts for the two socio-cultural settings

| CATEGORY | SOCIAL M | SETTING ST | CHI-SQUARE | D.F. | SIGNIFICANCE |
|----------|-------------|---------------|------------|------|--------------|
| 1 | 21.8% | 14.7% | 3.94287 | 1 | .0471 |
| 2 | 18.6% | 17.0% | .16085 | 1 | .6884 |
| 3 | 42.7% | 30.4% | 8.30225 | 1 | .0040 |
| 4 | 53.7% | 33.9% | 20.74047 | 1 | .0000 |
| 5 | 27.4% | 27.7% | .00000 | 1 | 1.0000 |
| 6 | 13.6% | 20.1% | 3.86271 | 1 | .0494 |
| 7 | 44.9% | 29.0% | 13.94553 | 1 | .0002 |
| 8 | 2.5% | .0% | 4.24528 | 1 | .0394 |
| 9 | 5.6% | 2.2% | 3.09030 | 1 | .0788 |
| 10 | .6% | 3.1% | 4.31439 | 1 | .0378 |
| 11 | 4.5% | 8.9% | 3.84214 | 1 | .0500 |
| 12 | 2.0% | 17.4% | 42.52754 | 1 | .0000 |
| 13 | 17.5% | 21.9% | 1.41215 | 1 | .2347 |

M – metropolitan setting, ST – small town setting, D.F. – degree of freedom

With the social setting as the independent variable, statistically significant differences were found in the frequency of Categories 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 12.

It seems that learners in metropolitan settings are more aware of the benefits of the knowledge of English (Categories 1, 3, 4, 8, 10). It may be that life in large towns offers more opportunities to make use of such knowledge. On the other hand, the more opportunity one has to use English, the more aware one becomes of it as a language and the more attached to it one becomes (Categories 7, 12). Lacking all this, a learner in a small town setting may more frequently feel forced to learn.

Conclusion

Motivation for learning English as a foreign language is likely to differ from motivation for learning English as a second language. One important source of motivation in the foreign language setting is the teaching component.

Teaching can influence motivation to a great extent: it can be a motivator as well as a powerful demotivator. An insight into this relationship is of extreme importance as teaching is the component of language learning that can most readily be modified.

Some of the motives stated by the learners in this study showed significantly different frequency in different age groups as well as in different social settings. This fact points to some important aspects that should be kept in mind when studying motivation for learning English as a foreign language.

REFERENCES

- BROWN, H.D. (1973) Affective Variables in L2 Acquisition. *Language Learning*, 23, 231–234.
- BURSTALL, C. (1975) Primary French in the Balance. Windsor: National Foundation for Educational Research.
- GARDNER, R.C. and LAMBERT, W.E. (1972) *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Newbury House.
- GARDNER, R.C. (1979) Social psychological aspects of L2 acquisition. *Language and Social Psychology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- (1980) on the Validity of Affective Variables in Second Language Acquisition: Conceptual, Contextual, and Statistical Considerations. *Language Learning*, 30, 255–270.
- (1985) *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- LUKMANI, Y. (1972) Motivation to Learn and Learning Proficiency. *Language Learning*, 22, 261–273.
- MCDONOUGH, S.H. (1986) *Psychology in Foreign Language Teaching*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- OLLER, J.W. and PERKINS, K. (1978) Intelligence and Language Proficiency as Sources of Variance in Self-Reported Affective Variables. *Language Learning*, 28, 85–97.
- OSTOJIĆ, B. (1980) Psihološki i društveni faktori i nastava stranih jezika. Sarajevo: Svjetlost.
- PIERSON, H.D., PU, G.S., LEE, S. (1980) An Analysis of the Relationship Between Language Attitudes and English Attainment of Secondary Students in Hong Kong. *Language Learning*, 30, 289–316.
- SCHUMANN, J.H. (1975) Affective factors and the problem of age in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 25, 209–235.
- SPOLSKY, B. (1969) Attitudinal Aspects of Second Language Learning. *Language Learning*, 19, 271–283.
- UPSHUR, J.A., ACTON, W., ARTHUR, B. and GUIORA, A.Z. (1978) Causation or Correlation: A Reply to Oller and Perkins. *Language Learning*, 28, 99–104.
- VILKE, M. (1977) Uvod u glotodidaktiku. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- WEINER, B. and KUKLA, A. (1970) An attributional analysis of achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 15, 1–20.

ISTRAŽIVANJE MOTIVACIJE ZA UČENJE ENGLESKOG KAO STRANOG JEZIKA – PROJEKT U TOKU

Zamoljeni da opišu svoju motivaciju za učenje engleskog kao stranog jezika jugoslavenski učenici u svom ispitivanju naveli su motive različitih tipova. Ti su se motivi razlikovali od instrumentalne-integrativne dihotomije Lamberta i Gardnera. Motivi jugoslavenskih učenika odnosili su se na ulogu engleskog jezika u svijetu, na osobine jezika kao takvog te na nastavnu situaciju. Pokazalo se da se učestalost nekih od ovih motiva značajno razlikuje prema dobi i socio-kulturnoj sredini kojoj učenik pripada.