A self-aware learner: motivating students' language learning, performance, and persistence

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Why US college students take Russian?

- GRL: the Great Russian Literature
- The Eastern enigma: It's a fascinating country
- History (czars; revolutions/Cold War/space race)
- Politics: geopolitical role of Russia in the world
- Russian friend(s)
- Family background (non-heritage)
- It's a challenging language: something non-Romance
- Working/doing research in the post-Soviet countries

Experience suggests...

- 1st semester: students are full of hopes, eagerness to work hard, and expectations that they will *soon* start participating *fully* in a language community.

- 2nd semester: stress level is up, frustrations are setting in

- 2nd year: many students feel frustrated, demotivated, and fatigued

What is the source of the problem?

- Textbook?
- The teaching method?
- The instructor himself/herself?
- The amount of work?
- Changes in motivation?

What is the source of the problem?

- Changes in motivation
  - Unfounded expectations of language learning
  - Lack of familiarity with best language learning practices
  - Ignorance of the nature of L2 acquisition

Language Learning Motivation

- Complex and composite construct;
- Has a number of key components;
- Their interrelationship is subject to debate;
- Their exact contribution can be interpreted in different ways.

Motivational Components

- **Integrativeness**: positive outlook toward L2 speakers to the extent that one wants to integrate with their community (Gardner et al., 1985; Lambert 1980)

- **Instrumentality**: the perceived *pragmatic* benefits of L2 proficiency (Gardner et al., 1985)

- **Attitudes toward L2** speakers/community (Gardner et al., 1985; Spolsky 1969)

Motivational Components

- **Cultural Interests**: appreciation of cultural products associated with L2 speakers (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983)

- **Milieu**: social influences from the immediate environment (family, friends, teachers)

- **Linguistic Self-Confidence**: belief that the mastery of L2 is well within the learner's means; subsumes learner's believes about his abilities and perception of one's coping potential (Clement, 1980)

Motivational Components: our students

- **Integrativeness**: positive outlook toward L2 speakers to the extent that one wants to integrate with this community

- **Linguistic Self-Confidence**: belief that the mastery of L2 is well within the learner's means; subsumes learner's believes about his abilities and perception of one's coping potential.

Integrativeness

- Dornyei & Csizer, 2002: expanding the notion of Gardner's integrativeness
  - Adding the concept of *possible selfs* (Markus and Nurius, 1986): "individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming"

  - Adding the concept of *ideal self* (characteristics that a person would like to have) and *ought self* (attributes a person ought to have)

- Broader definition of integrativeness:

  "motivation in L2 learning is the desire to achieve one's **ideal L2 self** by reducing the discrepancy between one's actual and ideal selves. Motivation will be dependent on the learner's ability to develop a salient vision of self as an agreeable, competent and successful L2 user."

Self-Determination Theory

- Concerns with identity development and how interest development contributes to identity formation (La Guardia, 2009)

- People are likely to devote their energies to activities that promote three psychological needs

  – Autonomy: self-initiated and self-regulated actions

  – Competence: feeling of mastery of the subject

  – Relatedness: the need to feel acceptance

Interim summary: useful points

- "Motivation will be dependent on the learner's ability to develop a salient vision of self as an agreeable, competent and successful L2 user."

- People are likely to devote their energies to activities that promote three psychological needs
  - Autonomy: self-initiated and self-regulated actions
  - Competence: feeling of mastery of the subject

Classroom Motivational Strategies

- The essence of motivational strategies is to create and maintain/enhance the conditions for motivational capacity:
  - Help develop a salient vision of self as L2 learner and built linguistic self-confidence
  - Create conditions that give the feeling of mastery of the subject
  - Design activities that promote learner autonomy

More specifically...

- Educate learners about the process of language learning (multiple opportunities)

  – Concept of proficiency and its components
  – Inverted pyramid of language learning
  – Concept of language difficulty
  – Time expectations
  – Effort expectations
  – The nature of the process involved in increasing proficiency
  – Language modalities
  – Successful language learning strategies
  – Psychological barriers

More specifically...

- Create opportunities for learners to feel mastery of the subject
  - Assessment aligns with clearly stated learning goals
  - Students are given opportunities to take risks and are rewarded for it
  - Students are given opportunities to reflect on goals and their progress toward them
    - Declarative knowledge
    - Procedural knowledge
  - Regular reviewing of language learning process

More specifically...

- Promote learners' autonomy
  - Learner-centered classroom
  - Self-assessment: LinguaFolio, U of Oregon
  - Independent tasks: language portfolios, language projects, etc.
  - Flipped model
  - Multitude of low-stake assignments before a high-stake task

What students think...

- **Did the understanding of the pyramid of language learning help you in your learning?**

  – 100% yes
  – the pyramid was really helpful because it made sense of how language comes to a person, and the realistic levels of what we can achieve in the class

What students think...

- **Did the explanation of how language is acquired help you in your learning?**

  - Yes, because it made the process of learning such a hard language seem more reasonable

  - Yes. It better described to me how I should approach learning it.

  - Yes, it was helpful to know that it takes more time than other languages, it helps keep you motivated when things are tough. Knowing strategies of how people learn language is also very interesting and helped with studying strategies.

  - Yes; it allowed me to be patient with myself

  - It helped me in my understanding that it is a process and will take a lot of time and practice to get to the proficiency that I want.

  - Yes. The explanation gave me a more strategic approach to learning the language.

What students think...

- **What effect did the explanation of how language is acquired have on your motivation to learn Russian, if any?**

    - It made the process and path clearer and provided an end goal rather than this concept of a whole language to learn.
    - In terms of the language pyramid, it motivated me to strive to learn Russian at the advanced stage.
    - It helps when realizing how much there is to learn before mastering it.
    - It made me more motivated knowing Russian from my household; it made me feel like if I really worked at it, I'd have a good chance of becoming more proficient in the language.
    - It helped me feel more confident in my approach of learning Russian.

Summary

- Motivational challenge of 2nd-year Russian
  - many students feel frustrated, demotivated, and fatigued

- Motivating students' learning, performance and persistence by building a students' vision of a successful L2 self, promoting autonomy and guiding students to feel the mastery of the subject

Useful References

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