Week 11 – Motivation

Answers


1. What is motivation and what affects it?

Motivation is interesting to us because like learning itself, motivation is about behavior. In fact we can say that it is motivation that drives behavior. The word motivation itself derives from the Latin word for movement. Just as all situations of language use are situated, all aspects of goal-orientated behavior are motivated. Simply put, someone does something because they are motivated to do so on one way or another. From the other side, and one that is equally or even more applicable to our situation, people also do not do something because of their motivation levels. Ratey (2001: 247) says that motivation is a process that ties emotion to action. So, emotion (for SLA, affect) is clearly something that has an important impact on motivation. And motivation is something that impacts/drives everything we do. As a result, researchers and some teachers have seen motivation as the key to effective life-long language learning.

As one of the most studied areas of SLA in recent years, motivation has become a sort of blanket term for many related elements and a wide range of different concerns have been integrated within the large area of motivation. This tight scrutiny of motivation has led to several observations and variations of motivation being proposed. First of all, like the issues related to personality we briefly discussed last week, motivation is also being seen as dynamic and subject to rash variations across time (Dörnyei, 2003). This basically means that motivation is not necessarily fixed but changes often quite dramatically as a result of external factors. Like everything else, motivation is context sensitive. Thus, we have both state and trait variations on motivation, just as we seem to do for personality. There are also different types of motivation. These basically make reference to the things that motivate one (drive one to do something), for example, becoming a member of a particular speech community. This is the type of motivation that has profoundly affected studies in immigrant countries where people were coming in from outside and may feel the need to integrate into that society. Much of the work of Gardner and his colleagues, as elaborated on in Masgoret and Gardner (2003) revolves around the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation.

**Integrative – Instrumental**

As mentioned above, integrative motivation basically related to the desire for someone to want to be seen by others as a member of a specific society, in this case the Target Language (TL) society. Thus, for example, someone who has moved to Canada and is planning on staying there forever may find it useful and important to integrate into the society as fully as possible as this might get them more opportunities. They may also be treated better by others. In effect, by integrating one simply wants to be treated the same as others and have the same opportunities. Of course language is a very important outward manifestation of one’s identity. If someone wants to integrate this means behaving in a similar way as others; the members of the (speech) community. Language is an important form of behavior for humans. So, the motivation (need or desire) to integrate into a certain speech community means that people will put a lot of energy into changing their linguistic behavior to match that of that community. Researchers in English-speaking countries that have traditionally played host to large immigrant populations see this, not surprisingly, as a very positive thing.
Integrative motivation is an internal desire and as such is seen as being stronger than external ones as we shall discuss below. In instrumental motivation language development and language use are seen as tools for achieving specific, concrete goals. For example, having good language skills in English, as evidenced by some test like the ToEIC, might be a prerequisite for getting a job. One is motivated to get a job and English is just an instrument for achieving that goal. Once one has gotten the job the need for English is gone and so is any motivation to maintain or further develop the language. Instrumental motivation is seen as being less directly connected to the individual. In instrumental motivation language is also a tool for integrating into society, but it is not a tool that can be just thrown away or ignored. There is no end point to integration. It is a lifestyle choice. It is building an identity which may not go away. In this way, integrative motivation is seen as being stronger and certainly more enduring than instrumental motivation.

Looking at our own situation it might seem strange that our own students are integratively motivated but we do actually use aspects of integrative motivation to try to get our students to put more energy into learning English. We generally do this by expounding on the positive aspects of English speaking countries as a way of creating positive attitudes. In a more modern sense, especially when dealing with English we can speak an interest in integrating into the world. And of course, there is a difference between integration in a deep sense of acculturation.

In the literature and also in two of the papers we read for today (Dörnyei, 2003; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003) there is an important if not completely clear distinction between integrative motivation, as discussed above, and integrativeness. The idea of integrativeness centers on one’s posturing in relation to other cultures. It could be an openness to the perceived norms of a particular target (language) culture. It could also be an acceptance that the culture is also valid. Integrativeness could even be a general feeling of xenophilia, or a affection for what is unknown, including or especially for foreign cultures, people and languages. So, there is a wide range of different degrees, in a sense, to integrativeness.

One thing that is often overlooked in the idea of integrative motivation are the norms of the host society as well as the prevailing attitudes in the society in which the learners come from. Some societies may not be easy to integrate into, especially for certain groups due to prejudices and other factors. Some groups also very strong ethnic identity issues which can make integrative motivation less of a viable option. Also, instrumental motivation can also be very strong and also enduring. So, from our perspective, it is not so easy to say that integrative motivation is somehow better or even appropriate. If anything, it is the global community that our students may want to integrate into and right now English is a part of that. But the term global community is still a very nebulous, ill-defined term. In effect, we need to look at this in different ways.

**Intrinsic - Extrinsic**

The terms intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have also been used. They are seen as being similar to integrative and instrumental, but are more general and, as a result, more useful for our situation. The big contrast between these two is the based on the source of the motivation. For intrinsic motivation the source comes from within the learners. For example, a learner might have an intrinsic (internal) need to be successful (most of us do), or a need to be valued by others. This intrinsic motivation impels us to act in ways that feel good. It is an internally-driven process based on conceptualizations and values that we have established through previous behaviors. Extrinsic motivation is motivation that comes from outside us. We are motivated to do something not for internal reasons but for concrete, external reasons. For example, the chocolate (bribes) that many teachers give to children to get them to do something provides extrinsic motivation. It is motivation that is external to the task at hand and, although it may increase task involvement, can also distract the learners from the task. The learner’s focus is on the chocolate, not the thing they are supposed to be doing and the learning that is supposed to occur as a result.

It is not hard to see the similarities and connections between integrative-intrinsic and instrumental-extrinsic motivation. Of these two pairs, it is the more general intrinsic – extrinsic dichotomy that is more useful to us. The idea being that we need to motivate the students to put effort into the task at hand and the process of language learning as we have set them up in the class.
Different variables have been proposed as affecting motivation in relation to the learning of a foreign or second language. Among these are several important factors listed and explained below.

Identity
Foreign or second language learning as we have seen, and as addressed in the concept of integrative motivation, involves a possible change in identity. Of course, like anything else, changes to conceptualization can be laid out on a continuum. At one extreme end of the continuum one might completely change allegiances from one group to another in learning a new language and let one new identity subsume their old one. At the other end of the continuum is the person who refuses to alter their identity and the process of being confronted with another language to learn only strengthens their own sense of identity. In between we have a wide range of different reactions to language learning regarding identity. In effect, foreign or even some second language learning may impel people to alter their identity provided they want to learn to use the language well. This is particularly important in the area of pronunciation, but pertains to all areas of language use. Languages are linked to certain groups of speakers and speaking a language means that one is a member of that group in one way or another. In this way, speaking a language well entails some sort of identity shift. If one is not willing to make that kind of shift then they might not learn the language well.

Attitudes
Attitudes come in various forms. There are attitudes toward the TL speech community (communities in the case of English). Attitudes toward language is general are also important. These include attitudes about how language is used as well as forms of language – the importance of spoken and written language. There are also basic attitudes toward language learning and how one views the process. It is not hard to imagine that having positive attitudes toward any of the different aspects related to language learning would be important for motivation. Certainly positive attitudes impel people to do things. If one has neutral attitudes, then they are less inclined to continue with something, especially when it gets difficult, which it almost always does. Having negative attitudes means one will avoid doing that thing. Thus, part of our job as language teachers is to try to help the students form more positive attitudes towards the different aspects of (English) language learning.
We can think of attitudes as being part of intrinsic motivation and we want to approach them intrinsically. They are internal and we cannot teach attitudes, we need to help our experience things in a way that will affect their attitudes positively. Attitudes come from our society but also from our own experience. They are also subject to change and that is the important message regarding motivation. It is part of our job to help students develop more positive and also realistic attitudes. It will make learning and teaching easier in the long run if we do so.

Willingness to communicate
Another interesting variable related to second and foreign language learning and motivation is that of willingness to communicate (McCrosky & Richmond, 1990; MacIntyre et al, 1998; Yashima, 2002). Willingness to communicate (WTC) is basically a measurement of a learner’s willingness to use their L2 for communicative purposes. Researchers see as a useful measurement which intersects and incorporates many other aspects related to motivation. As the goals of second and foreign language learning shift from a purely academic focus to ones more focusing on communicative competence, this becomes a more important aspect of ones motivation in the L2 language classroom and beyond.

Task motivation
Another important consideration in the area of motivation is that of tasks. We have discussed the idea that there are these general aspects of motivation related to language learning, what we might refer to as trait effects. Trait effects can also be affected by the specific situation created in the classroom, for example. Within the classroom one way we have of controlling the situation is through the tasks we use. Thus, tasks play an important role in how we might manage students involvement and also motivation levels in/during the class. There are different ways in which tasks can motivate
or demotivate learners. Sercu et al. (n.d.) discuss task factors related to complexity and find that complexity is related to the task conditions. The theme and the functions needed to complete a task can also have a large effect on student motivation to complete the task. Robinson (2011) provides a comprehensive review of the variables related to tasks and task-based learning. Since there are many different features of tasks (Robinson, 2011 names seven) it is important for teachers to be aware of the effects of these different task variables on their students. They can be used to help students learn better, which in and of itself, is motivating. Likewise, different aspects of tasks may appeal to or repel students in different ways. Thus, teachers need to be cognizant of tasks effects on motivation. In general, this boils down to developing tasks that are cognitively engaging for the students but also not too difficult for them.

**Strategy use**
The basic fact that students are employing strategies would seem to imply that students are also motivated to do something. In reality, students might also be using strategies that help them avoid something. Even for students motivated by the best intentions, use of the wrong or less helpful strategies can result in problems and that can be demotivating. There is nothing new (I think we are all aware of the importance of using the right strategies for the right job) here except that we need to be aware of the idea that strategy use is a sign of motivation and has an effect on motivation. We can use strategy use as a tool not just for performing better in the class but also motivating students. Showing students ways of performing better is certainly motivating.

**Achievement**
The use of strategies is linked to the idea of achievement. The basic idea here is simple. Doing well is motivational. People enjoy being successful and probably do not enjoy being unsuccessful. Generally if people feel they are not achieving very much despite some effort they will simply stop put effort into something. This is the basis of the theory of learned helplessness (Seligman and Maier, 1967). In the idea of learned helplessness someone has learned that their efforts have no effect. As a result they will stop. So for example, if a person is standing outside a thick metal door and told to open it, they will pull and pound on it for a while but the realization will quickly set in that they will not be able to open the door and they will give up. Once one has learned they are helpless, they give up. If in the same situation, one finds that by beating on the door in a certain soft spot, they will continue to pound and may pound harder on the door as long as they feel they are making sufficient progress and there is a good reason for beating down the door.

Thus, when we think about achievement there are two main concerns. First, as teachers, we need to find ways for students, all students, to feel like they are making some sort of progress. In a related concern, we need to be very much cognizant of the goals that we set and which the students have. We do not necessarily serve all students well by creating overzealous or unattainable goals. Goals, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, also need to be related to the students. If goals are related to the students, the students themselves can measure their own achievement against goals that are personally meaningful. Learned helplessness often comes when external assessments that do not really have much meaning are imposed on students are the only information students get on their development. The number means little and always stay the same because of the assessments used. Thus, even if a student is improving their number on the assessment might go down, making them feel as if they have regressed, not improved.

If we think about our own situation all Korean learners of English I have taught and spoken to feel some animosity toward English and much of this has to do with their own feelings regarding their perceptions on achievement. They never feel satisfied because they want to be perfect, not realizing that perfect does not exist in generalized form in language knowledge or use. For better motivation, we need to help our students feel that they are making progress not from our (the extrinsic) perspective, but from their own (intrinsically).

**Sociocultural milieu**
Although the sociocultural milieu is not often a discussion in SLA studies, it is a concern of bilingual studies. The basic idea is that language learning and, more importantly, language use is not determined by the individual learner but rather by the society. So, for example a society like Korea
in which spoken English use is frowned upon among Koreans affects motivation. In such a sociocultural milieu people will not be motivated to learn English for speaking. of course we can do these things in the classroom but what is happening, or not happening as the case may be, outside the class does affect learning and attitudes. There may be little we as teachers can do in the short term to change norms found in the society, but we need to be aware of the challenges facing students due to sociocultural norms and even make the students (provided they are old enough to understand) aware of the situation and the possible effects on their learning and attitudes. Even young children can be affected by the sociocultural milieu of their community so it is something that we need to deal with.

**Age**

We have already discussed the issue of age in class from the perspectives of SLA, but it should be clear that age issues affect motivation in that children will be motivated by different things than adults. Regarding intrinsic motivation, they might actually be quite similar but what motivates people extrinsically. Also what is extrinsic for children might become intrinsic for adults. For example, children will not be motivated by the promises of more money jobs or status because these are things that are quite distant from them. The same goes for promises of globalization. Globalization is an abstract concept that means little to children. These are things that motivate parents in Korea to make their children study a language like English, but the child will not necessarily adopt their parents’ and teachers’ motivation, particularly when they do not understand it. Children are less motivated by ideas than by acts and this means physical acts also empowering acts. For children such things as chocolate, candy, and stickers work as extrinsic motivation because they are things that are valued for themselves. The same things can be used for intrinsic motivation for adults provided they are provided a meaning outside of themselves.

**Experience**

Experience, both and bad, has a large effect on motivation. Bad experiences may lead to less motivation on the basic idea that the student will be less inclined to want to relive a bad experience and will practice avoidance. Good experiences will increase motivation to relive those experiences. It is important to mention here that experiences in the classroom are mediated by the teacher and the other students. This means that the teacher plays an important role in helping students color their experiences as positive or negative. The teacher also sets up situations in which the students need to experience something. In many ways it is the teacher who has some control over the student experience in the classroom.

**Instrumentality**

Finally, the idea of instrumentality is an important idea in that very often teachers tend to focus on language is an instrument or tool, and a rather benign one at that. If language is viewed as a tool that it is possible to use whatever tools are necessary to help students learn that tool. Language, however, is more than just a tool. If learned well a language becomes part of person. This means that yes instrumental motivation is quite important and maybe more important and the beginning of the learning process, but we also need to appeal to the learners internally with extrinsic motivation.

2. How does it relate cognitively to some of the basic models we have so far presented in class? Looking back at some of the different ideas (models) we have presented so far, it is helpful to see how motivation fits into or relates to them. Among cognitive psychologists and cognitive scientists motivation is seen as related pretty much all the different cognitive functions that we have discussed previously. Among the functions where motivation plays an important role are attention, memory, emotion, movement, cognition, and of course language (use).

At a very basic level motivation is tied to perception and awareness/noticing because we cannot be motivated by something if we are not at all aware of it. In effect, our perceptual system is more or less controlled by motivation. We are motivated to focus our attention in certain places. We tend to focus our attention on things that are meaningful to us in that we have experienced them before and we are able to discern their importance among a huge field of other possible information. We have said above and to find motivation through the idea of energy allotment. This is something that
is very much related to attention and noticing (our perceptual systems) because attention requires energy. The more energy we put into noticing something the better we will be able to notice it and that is something that is very closely tied to motivation. In the discussion above it seemed like we almost equated motivation two positive things, but that is not necessarily the case at this level - at the level of attention. We said that people will him avoid experiences and other concepts which have been negative for them, or which they perceived negatively, but they first need to notice that in order to make that command decision.

Based on this we can really argue that motivation itself lies at two fundamental levels. These are this level of perception but also the level of movement and cognition (with the idea that these are closely connected from a cognitive perspective). This ties in also with the idea we talked about and which we will discuss immediately below of emotion. We are motivated to notice things that have strong emotive content for us, whether good or bad. This is the basic level. What we decide to do in relation to these strong emotive contents is the other aspect of motivation. We will be motivated to avoid these things or we will engage them. Obviously is engagement that we want as teachers, but avoidance itself is an important strategy that students need to learn and can be useful.

An important part of motivation which was not mentioned in any of the studies we read (although Dörnyei (2003) does mention the work of Schumann, which is tantalizingly close to this point) is the idea of what Hamers and Blanc (2000) refer to as valorization. Basically, in the midbrain there are structures called the amygdala and it is there which the values for all the different concepts one has internalized are stored. Thus, every concept has some emotive value set for it, whether positive, negative, or neutral. We mentioned this in relation to the system of attention but it obvious and through attention affects other and all systems. We all know that concepts form part of the meaning of a word or lexical item. But it is also true that ‘translation equivalents’ across languages can and often do have different valorizations for their underlying concepts, at least in their respective monolingual communities. The emotive values associated with concepts not only have an affect on whether and how we focus our attention on that word/entity but also how we will react to it. It is not just words themselves that have emotive force but ideas, scenarios, settings (or aspects of settings) among other things. As humans with language, however, we tend to break these things down into concepts and these are represented by lexical units both big and small.

Ratey (2001) lays out the complex array of connections that involve motivation, linking systems through different parts of our midbrain structures. This is interesting because midbrain structures are evolutionarily older than what we often perceive as higher order cognitive systems. It seems then that the system of motivation this very much tied in with memory and this is an important realization. We are motivated by things we know and maybe also by novelty so then in a negative way the things that we do not know. This ties into what we briefly discussed above in relation to age. In many ways adults are easier to motivate because they know more. We can appeal to their knowledge and their experience and in doing so can motivate them intrinsically.

Since motivation is related to goals and goal-oriented behavior, motivation also has a large effect on working memory. Goals themselves are part of our working memory. We need to hold goals in working memory until we have felt we have achieved them. Motivation makes our working memory work better. In this symbiotic relationship it also seems that good working memory is also necessary for achieving high levels of motivation. As we discussed above motivation is based on what we know when this is certainly something which is stored in long-term memory, but in any given moment we have to hold that information and be able to manipulate and be able to use that information with working memory.

3. What are some of the different components that have been proposed for motivation?
Following Masgoret and Gardner (2003) there are four major components that can be considered part of motivation and these are the elements that are part of Gardner’s (2004) AMTB (Attitude /Motivation Test Battery) (retrievable online from: http://publish.uwo.ca/~gardner/docs/englishamtb.pdf)

Integrativeness - Openness to identify with another culture (TL culture, in particular)
   Attitudes toward TL group
   Integrative orientation
Interest in foreign languages

Attitudes toward the learning situation – reactions toward learning context
  Evaluation of the course
  Evaluation of the teacher

Motivation – goal-directed behavior
  Motivational intensity
  Desire to learn the TL
  Attitudes towards learning the TL

Orientations
  Instrumental
  Integrative

These can be seen as affecting each other in relation to some other constructs such as;
  Achievement
  Sociocultural Mileu
  Age and Experience with the language

4. What can we do as English teachers in Korea to help raise our students’ motivation?
   Following Dörnyei (2003) there are several things we can do in the classroom and beyond to try to raise and retain motivation at a high level.

Creating the right conditions
   Trying to define what the right conditions would be is a tall order in general. This really depends on who your students are and what the goals of your class are. The simplest way of looking at this is through the idea of attitudes. The right situation in the class in a very general sense would be a class that has positive attitudes. This means they are in the right frame of mind to go in and be motivated. In essence this means they go into class knowing that they are going to put energy into learning/doing something.

Getting students initially motivated
   This is something that relates to what to do with it at individual lesson for example. In effect, we can say that it is a kin to activating schema during a warm-up. In fact we can simply say that the main goal here is to use the warm-up to try to motivate students get them excited (raise energy levels) about what's going to happen in class that day. In many ways it's like a pep talk.

Maintaining and promoting motivation
   Of course there are many different ways to maintain and promote motivation in our students, but I think the one that really strikes home for us and has the most value is that of the type of feedback that we provide our students. If students are getting ambiguous feedback, or negative feedback, or no feedback that is going to be hard for them to maintain high motivation levels. Again, it is success that motivates people to try to do more and be more successful. If we don't somehow provide feedback that enable students to feel that they our being successful or that have a chance of being successful then it's hard to maintain and promote motivation. This does not mean constantly praising students when they don't deserve praise because they were quickly see through that and the phrase itself will lose any type of meaningful value.

Establishing positive reflection and self-evaluation
   This relates to what we mentioned above but puts the focus on the learner herself. Again, looking intrinsically as opposed to extrinsically, learners also have an idea themselves of how well they are doing. We need learners to reflect in a balanced way. Often what we find with our learners how is that the focus solely on negative aspects of their performance, completely boring positive things. This is because there is an inordinate focus on forms and not meaning and other equally important aspects of language. We need to look holistically at the students’ performance and in doing so also provide students ways to do the same.

Each of these is a rather large area and includes a wealth of different areas of focus for teachers.
References