

## Theories of Motivation and Language Learning

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### 1. Integrative motivation:

Field: These ideas come from research on language learning.

Important scholars: Robert Gardner.

Key terms: integrative motivation, instrumental motivation.

Summary of basic ideas: These ideas came from research in Canada on the motivation of French speakers to learn English and English speakers to learn French. The theory is best known for the distinction it makes between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is the desire of the learner to interact or even integrate with the community that speaks the target language, for example, the desire of Anglophone Canadians to become more deeply involved with the Francophone community and vice versa. In contrast, instrumental motivation is driven by practical long-term rewards such as better job opportunities or better pay and short-term rewards such as good test scores and grades. One of Gardner's key findings was that learners who had a strong desire to interact with speakers of the target language and become part of their community (integrative motivation) were relatively likely to succeed in learning the other language.

### 2. Goal-setting theories:

Field of study: These ideas come from research in psychology.

Important scholars: Edwin Locke and Gary Latham.

Key terms: goal theory, goal setting theories, proximal/distal goals, agency.

Summary of basic ideas:

- ❖ One finding of Locke and Latham's work was that people are generally more motivated to work toward goals that are relatively difficult or challenging. While very modest goals are easy to achieve, attaining them requires little commitment, and the resulting sense of achievement is also small. In contrast, a more ambitious goal that leads to more progress would generate greater satisfaction and stronger motivation to continue. Of course, it is also important that goals not be so difficult that they are unrealistic, but in general relatively challenging and specific goals tend to be more effective in generating motivation.
- ❖ Locke and Latham also found that people tend to be more motivated to work toward goals that are quite specific. The problem with vague goals is that it is hard to tell whether one has reached them, or even made a substantial progress toward them. In contrast, it is easier to see achievement when goals are specific.
- ❖ Later work on the relationship between goals and motivation focused on the importance of setting short-term goals. While major long term goals are

necessary because they provide a sense of significance and importance, they also tend to be broader and vaguer; they also tend to be far in the future, which weakens their motivational power today. In contrast, short-term goals can be attained sooner and progress toward them is more visible.

- ❖ One additional finding of research on goal setting and motivation is that in general people tend to be more motivated to achieve goals they have chosen for themselves rather than goals chosen for them by others. The more people have a sense of “agency” – of being in control – the more they are likely to feel empowered and motivated, and the more likely they are to persist in working toward goals over a long period of time.

### **3. Expectancy value theories.**

Field of study: These ideas come from research in psychology.

Important scholars: John Atkinson, Albert Bandura.

Key terms: expectancy-value theories, expectancy of success, achievement motivation, efficacy beliefs.

Summary of basic ideas: What these theories have in common is the idea that people are more likely to be motivated if they expect success or at least belief success is possible. For example:

- ❖ Atkinson’s “achievement motivation theory” looked at the role of two factors: 1) expectancy = whether one expects and believes success is possible; 2) value = how important success is. The theory itself can be summed up as an equation: expectancy X value = motivation; in other words, a person is likely to be highly motivated if the goal is worth achieving and success seems to be possible.
- ❖ Bandura’s work on efficacy beliefs suggested that people are more likely to be motivated if they believe they have the ability to be successful in achieving a goal.

### **4. Attribution theories.**

Field of study: These ideas are from research in psychology.

Important scholars: Bernard Weiner.

Key terms: attribution theory.

Summary of basic ideas: These theories focus on attributions, in other words, the conclusions people draw when they try to make sense of success or failure. The basic idea is that when people either succeed or fail in their attempts to complete a project or achieve a goal, they will try to understand why they succeeded or failed, and the explanations they adopt will affect their subsequent motivation. If, for example, people decide they failed because they lack the ability to do something, they are less likely to try again, In contrast, if they decide they failed because they didn’t work hard enough or didn’t use the right strategy, there is a much greater chance that they will be motivated to try again.

### **5. Self-determination theory.**

Field of study: These ideas are from research in psychology.

Important scholars: Edward Deci, Richard Ryan.

Key terms: self-determination theory (SDT), intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation.

Summary of basic ideas: Researchers in psychology distinguish between two kinds of rewards that can drive motivation - extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is driven by rewards from outside the person such as good test scores, job opportunities, and so forth. In contrast, intrinsic motivation is driven by rewards that come from within the person, such as a sense of achievement, satisfying one's own curiosity, or the pleasure of a task and the challenge it provides. SDT scholars tend to emphasize that intrinsic motivation can be very powerful – in fact, often more powerful than extrinsic. It also tends to be more consistent and long-lasting because, unlike extrinsic motivation, it does not vanish when a particular outside reward vanishes, for example, when a test is completed.

### **6. Social motivation theory.**

Field of study: These ideas are from research in psychology.

Important scholars: Bernard Weiner.

Key terms: social motivation.

Summary of basic ideas: The basic idea is that people can be motivated – or demotivated - by the community of people around them in a variety of ways. For example people may be motivated by

- ❖ "social welfare goals, such as becoming a productive member of society;
- ❖ social solidarity goals, such as trying to bring some degree of honour to one's family;
- ❖ social approval goals, such as doing well in school to gain the approval of peers or teachers" (Dörnyei 2001, 30).

### **7. The Ideal L2 Self and the L2 Motivational Self System.**

Field: These ideas are from the field of language learning.

Important scholars: Zoltán Dörnyei.

Key terms: ideal L2 self, L2 motivational self system.

Summary of basic ideas: Dörnyei's replaces Robert Gardner's earlier term "integrativeness" (see above) with the term "Ideal L2 Self," and argues that often what drives learners is not simply a desire to interact with a community of target language speakers but also a desire to become a member of an imagined community of those who speak the target language. Based on this insight he proposed the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which organizes language learning motivation into three main categories:

- ❖ The Ideal L2 Self: This category includes factors relating to who the learner wants to interact with (integrativeness) and also who the learner wants to become.
- ❖ The Ought-To L2 Self: This category includes extrinsic and instrumental factors.
- ❖ The L2 Learning Experience: This category includes situation specific motives (such as whether or not one likes a language course) and also intrinsic motivation factors.

## 8. Investment

Field: These ideas are from the field of language learning.

Important scholars: Bonnie Norton.

Key terms: investment, identity.

Summary of basic ideas: The key idea in this research is that learners may be less willing to invest in language learning if they feel alienated from the society or educational system with which the target language is associated, or if learning the target language conflicts with their sense of identity. For example, if Middle Eastern Muslim immigrants to the US or Canada are in a school system where they experience prejudice against Muslims from the Middle East, or feel that by learning English they are somehow turning their backs on their own culture and identity, this may negatively impact their willingness to invest time and effort in learning English.

## 9. Languages Other Than English (LOTE)

Field: These ideas are from the field of language learning.

Important scholars: ?

Key terms: LOTE, utility value.

Summary of basic ideas: Very recently researchers have begun investigating the idea that the factors which motivate people to learn English as a second language may be very different from the factors that motivate people to learn languages other than English. This is because English has become so dominant as a global language that it offers a much larger range of benefits (utility value) than offered by any other language. It is also much easier to learn English because so many people around the world speak the language and because a wider range of resources is available for English than for any other language.