

THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Mercè Bernaus

This study investigates the role of motivation in foreign language learning and the factors that might affect learners' motivation. 137 secondary school students took part in the study. Correlations between the students' English proficiency and motivation were performed. Questionnaires on the ideal English teacher and the students' actual English teachers were also delivered. The purpose of correlating the ideal English teacher with the students' real English teachers was to investigate if this factor might affect student's motivation and consequently students' English proficiency. The results indicated that teachers affect students' motivation and that there exist significant correlations between motivation and foreign language learning.

A considerable amount of research has been directed at investigating the influence of student affective variables with respect to both on second/foreign language acquisition and their interaction with cognitive variables. Among others, attitudinal and motivational variables in second/foreign language acquisition have been identified as relevant factors and as predictors of students' language achievement. Gardner and his colleagues are the pioneers in this field of research and the scholars who have analyzed most extensively motivation and its effects on second language acquisition.¹

Even though a considerable amount of research on student affective variables has been accomplished, to date, relatively little research has been carried out on the factors that might affect students' motivation, such as the teacher. Nevertheless, since the late 60s some scholars like Cormon, Feenstra, Gardner, Girard, Holden, Lupescu

1.- Gardner, R.C. & Lambert, W.E. *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*, (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972); Gardner, R.C. *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*, (London: E. Arnold Publ., 1985); Gardner et al. "The Role of integrative motive on students' participation in the French classroom", *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 38, pp. 625-47, 1982; Gardner et al., "Language attitudes in a University context: a casual analysis", University of Western Ontario, *Research Bulletin*, 573, 1982; Gardner et al. "The common view of the good language learner: an investigation of teachers' beliefs", *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 44, 1, pp. 16-34, 1987; Gardner et al. "Second language learning in an immersion programme: factors influencing acquisition and retention", *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 8, 5, pp. 287-305, 1989.

& Day, Miller, Nerenz & Knop, Ralph, Savignon, and Rivers, have reported on teachers' attitudes and motivation in second language learning.² Factors such as pedagogical techniques, teaching materials, and the teacher's personality might interact with the individual difference variables to promote proficiency. For this reason, the English teacher will be taken into consideration in the present case study.

PURPOSE

My main interest was to study the role of motivation in foreign language acquisition, and to consider the interaction between students' socio-cultural background, classroom environments (especially the teacher), and motivational variables, and the effect of this interaction on achievement in the foreign language. For this reason this piece of research aimed to see whether the results followed my expectations of motivation affecting students' foreign language achievement, and which external factors, such as socio-cultural background or classroom environments (teacher), affect students' motivational variables on the one hand, and, on the other, students' foreign language achievement.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 137 students of 4 secondary schools in Barcelona (Spain) and its surroundings, who were studying English as a foreign language. One of the schools was attended by girls; students from the other three schools were 50% female and 50% male. All of them were bilingual —Spanish and Catalan- speakers.

2.- Cormon, F., "Humanistic activities and teacher motivation", *ELT Journal*, 40, 4, pp. 278-81, 1986; Feenstra, H.J. "Parent and teacher attitudes: Their role in second language acquisition", *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 26, 1, 1969; Gardner, R.C., "A Survey of attitudes of educators of American Indian children", University of Western Ontario, *Research Bulletin*, 66, 1968; Girard, D. "Motivation: The responsibility of the teacher", *ELT Journal*, 31, 2, pp. 97-102, 1977; Holden, S. (ed.), *Focus on the Learner. Bologna Conference 1983*, G.B.: Modern English Public., 1983; Holden, S., "Motivating the learner and the teacher", in Holden, S. (ed.); Lupescu, S. & Day, R. "Examining attitude in teachers and students: the need to validate questionnaire data", *Second Language Research*, 6, 2, pp. 123-34, 1990; Miller, P., "Ten characteristics of a good teacher", *English Teaching Forum*, XXV, 1, pp. 40-41, 1987; Nerenz A.G. & Knop, C.K., "A time based-approach to the study of teacher effectiveness", *Modern Language Journal*, 66, pp. 243-54, 1982; Ralph, E.G. "Research on effective teaching: How can it help L2 teachers motivate the unmotivated learner?", *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 46, 1, pp. 134-145, 1989; Savignon, S.J., "On the other side of the desk: A look at teacher attitudes and motivation in second language learning", *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 32, 3, pp. 295-304, 1976; Rivers, W.M., "Ten principles of interactive language learning and teaching" (forthcoming publication).

Students involved in this study came from different socio-cultural backgrounds. The dissimilarity in terms of socio-cultural background was chosen on purpose in order to see how the milieu might influence learners' motivation and foreign language acquisition.

Considering the teacher as a hypothetical important variable on the students' motivation, the learners' teachers were also included in this research. There was no special reason for choosing those teachers for this study: they were only chosen because they were teaching English in the selected schools at that time.

Materials

An **English Proficiency Test** was administered twice, firstly in the Autumn term and secondly in the Spring term to the same subjects. A **Motivation Test** was administered only once in Spring together with the English Proficiency post-test; this was thought the best moment to analyze the influence of the teachers on students' motivation.

Students' accuracy in writing and speaking English were to be tested in a way that the data could be processed easily; for this reason a multiple choice test was performed. The writing English Proficiency Test tested morphology, syntax, functions, reading comprehension, and vocabulary/spelling. The aural test presented six pictures to be matched with the sentences that the examiner read to the student. Aural English comprehension was tested. A second group of twelve pictures were drawn in order to make the students produce some specific English sounds, but this second part was not processed for the present study because it was thought not relevant enough to evaluate the students' oral English proficiency.

The **Motivation Test** was developed to be correlated with the English Proficiency Test in order to see how motivation might affect the students' acquisition of English. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to include the socio-cultural background of the students as well, knowledge of second and foreign languages, and also included inquiries more specifically related to the students' exposure to English. Three questions were related to students' English language learning difficulties. Students' learning improvement was self-evaluated, and the last part of the test was connected with learning strategies.

The second part constituted the main body of this test and contained questions related to motivation. This part of the test contained general orientations, and the rest of the inquiries were directed to test motivation in a foreign language situation, in a classroom setting, because all of them were connected with the English teacher's approach, and the students' appraisal of it and of their own English language improvement.

The **Ideal English Teacher Test** consisted of two parts: Part A contained a list of 28 adjectives that might portray the ideal English language teacher, depicted by students of English as a foreign language. Part B included 20 items that might describe the ideal way of teaching English as a foreign language. The questionnaire was completely written in Catalan in order to avoid any confusion.

The same questionnaire was administered to describe the students' **Present English Teacher**. The reason why the same questionnaire was chosen was due to the

fact that the 'ideal English teacher' was to be compared with the students' present English teacher, and to do so, the same personality and 'way of teaching English' measure was needed.

Statistical manipulation

A data base for each test was created. The programme used for this purpose was DBase III Plus. Once the data were transferred to the data base they were analyzed by means of the SPSS/PC + programme.

Each section in the English Proficiency test (morphology, syntax, functions, reading comprehension, vocabulary/spelling, and aural English comprehension) was given a grade. Finally, all the scores in the pre-test and post-test were added up to obtain a pre-test and a post-test English Proficiency grade per student. A third variable was also obtained: the students' English change scores, by means of subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score.

Each section in the Motivation Test was also given a grade and the variables obtained were the following: students' socio-cultural background, knowledge of languages, exposure to English, motivation, and learning English difficulties.

When correlations between the English Proficiency Test and the Motivation Test were to be made, the absolute and the relative gain scores as well as the raw and the standardized scores were computerized, and different kinds of analyses were performed, such as ANOVAS, Crosstabulations, Analysis of Correlation, T-tests, and Regression Analyses.

The alpha level for all statistical decisions was set at .05.

THE RESULTS

I would like to start this section on the results of the study presenting a diagram which, by means of frequencies, explains the hypothesis that motivation affects students' English proficiency and views the role that the English teacher plays on students' motivation. The diagram was performed by school and shows the percentage achieved by students on English proficiency change scores and motivation. Teachers' results show the percentage of coincidence with the 'ideal English teacher' in terms of personality and way of teaching (see Appendix, p. 22).

Once the results of the English proficiency test and Motivation test had been analyzed separately only correlating variables in-between the same tests, the results of the proficiency post-test were correlated with motivational and socio-cultural variables on the one hand, and, on the other, the English proficiency change scores were correlated with the same on motivational and sociocultural variables. These are the results that will be commented in this article.

Analyses of correlation between absolute change scores and motivation, and between percentage change scores and motivation were performed for each school. The results are as follows:

CORRELATIONS PERCENTAGE CHANGE SCORES/MOTIVATION
PER SCHOOL

TABLE 1			
VARIABLES	MOTIVATION SIGNIFICANCE		
MORPHOLOGY	SCHOOL CR	SCHOOL JM	SCHOOL MP
plural nouns		-.7034 *	
adverbs		-.7173 **	
's (verb or genit.)		-.7204 *	
FUNCTIONS	.3440 **		.5185 *
READING COMPREHENS.		-.5956 *	
SPELLING/VOCABULLARY	.2600 *		

As it is shown correlations between percentage change scores and motivation present positive and significant correlations in two of the schools. School JM shows significant but negative correlations between English proficiency and motivation. Many students in this school had very low motivation grades and presented low English language change scores; this may be the reason why the correlations are negative. Students in the other two schools presented high percentage change scores in English achievement as well as in motivation; that is why the correlations are positive and significant.

CORRELATIONS ABSOLUTE CHANGE SCORES/MOTIVATION
PER SCHOOL

TABLE 2		
VARIABLES	MOTIVATION SIGNIFICANCE	
MORPHOLOGY	SCHOOL CR	SCHOOL JM
adverbs		-.7111*
's (verb or genit.)		-.6229*
SYNTAX	.3368**	

Correlations between English absolute change scores and motivation are also negative in school JM and positive in school CR. The reasons for these results may be the same ones that explain the results obtained in the percentage change scores above mentioned.

Other analyses of correlation were performed with all the subjects between post-test scores and motivation. The variables that showed significance were the following:

CORRELATIONS POST-TEST SCORES/MOTIVATION ALL SUBJECTS
TABLE 3

TABLE 3	
VARIABLES	MOTIVATION SIGNIF.
MORPHOLOGY-verbs	-.2691**
plural nouns	-.2782**
SYNTAX	-.2077*
FUNCTIONS	-.3078/**
SPELLING/VOCABULARY	-.2800**

The correlations between English post-test scores and motivation are negative, possibly affected by the students in school JM, who held the highest post-test scores (but the lowest change scores between pre-test and post-test) and were the least motivated. Probably this group of students may had a specific weight in the analysis and for this reason the results are negative.

In a second stage, to see if students' socio-cultural background presented any significance when correlated with students' English proficiency, an analysis of variance was performed, as well as an analysis of correlation between students' socio-cultural background and students' English proficiency. The independent variables that showed significance in this ANOVA were the following:

- knowledge of languages (.0035)
- books and daily newspapers at home (.0000)

In the analysis of correlation the significant variables related to socio-cultural background are the same ones that were shown in the ANOVA: 'knowledge of languages' and 'books and papers at home'.

In a last stage, to identify which independent variables from the Motivation test were more important or contributed more to the dependent variable—students' English proficiency change scores, the data were analyzed by the procedure of multiple regression analysis. The entry system used was stepwise regression. The computer identifies the most important variables, which, in this case study, taking all the subjects together, were the following:

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS (ALL SUBJECTS)
DEPENDENT VARIABLE=ENGLISH PROFICIENCY CHANGE
SCORES

TABLE 4	
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	SIGNIFICANCE F/T
1 BOOKS AT HOME 0-100	.0047
2 YEARS STUDYING ENGLISH	.0017
3 ENGLISH READERS 1-3	.0004
4 WRITE CASTILIAN	.0002
5 NEWSPAPERS AT HOME 1 A MONTH	.0000
6 ENGLISH PAPERS/MAGAZINES AT HOME	.0000
7 LIKE STUDYING ENGLISH	.0000

PIN = .050 limits reached

Only two out of the seven variables entered in this regression analysis were related to motivation (3 and 7); the remaining five were related to students' socio-cultural background. Among these educational variables there are two (1 and 5) that correspond to students with a low sociocultural background and two (2 and 6) that correspond to students with a high education. In my opinion, variable 4 (Write Castilian) is not significant since all the students in this case study can write Castilian. After this first regression analysis it seems that high and low sociocultural backgrounds affect the students' English proficiency change scores just as motivation does.

Another multiple regression analysis was performed taking as the dependent variable the post-test English language score and as independent variables all the variables in the motivation test. The independent variables that entered in the regression analysis were the following:

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS (ALL SUBJECTS)
DEPENDENT VARIABLE=POST-TEST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
SCORES

TABLE 5	
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	SIGNIFICANCE F/T
1 MOTHER SECONDARY SCHOOL	.0000
2 MOTHER PRIMARY SCHOOL	.0000

3 SPEAK FRENCH	.0000
4 UNDERSTAND OTHER LANGUAGE	.0000
5 EXTRA-ACTIVITIES IN CLASS-SELDOM	.0000
6 FATHER PRIMARY SCHOOL	.0000
7 ENGLISH PAPERS /MAGAZINES AT HOME	.0000

PIN = .050 limits reached

This regression analysis shows similar results to the first one, only one variable is related to motivation (5) and the others refer to the students' socio-cultural background. In this analysis parents' education entered three times (variables 1,2 and 6).

To have a more complete view of the role played by motivation and/or socio-cultural background on the students' English language proficiency, other regression analyses have been performed by sex and by school, taking the same dependent and independent variables.

From the results in the regression analyses by sex 50% of independent variables related to motivation and 50% related to socio-cultural background entered in the females' regression analysis. Males have similar results: there are two independent variables related to motivation, two variables related to socio-cultural background and the other two are related to the knowledge of other languages.

The last step to analyze the correlations between the English proficiency test and the Motivation test consisted in two other multiple regression analyses, but this time only the independent variables related to motivation entered in both regression analyses. The dependent variable in the first regression was the students' English post-test scores and in the second one, the students' English proficiency change scores. The results were the following:

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS (ALL SUBJECTS)
DEPENDENT VARIABLE=ENGLISH POST-TEST SCORES

TABLE 6	
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	SIGNIFICANCE F/T
1 ATTRACTIVE WAY OF TEACHING	.0011
2 EXTRA-ACTIVITIES IN CLASS-SELDOM	.0005

PIN = .050 limits reached

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS (ALL SUBJECTS) DEPENDENT VARIABLE=ENGLISH CHANGE SCORES

TABLE 7	
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	SIGNIFICANCE F/T
1 ATTRACTIVE WAY OF TEACHING	.0103
2 ENGLISH READERS 1-3	.0035

PIN = .050 limits reached

Only two variables were entered in both regression analyses but, in my opinion, they are essential for the students' motivation in a situation of foreign language acquisition. Once more, the way of teaching appears to be an important factor for motivating the students on the one hand, and on the other, for increasing the students' English language proficiency. The variables related to the way of teaching have been entered many times in the previous regression analyses as well. From these results it can be stated that motivation through way of teaching in a situation of foreign language acquisition plays an important role on the students' language learning/ acquisition.

Motivation enters in the performed multiple regression analyses 16 times, followed by variables related to sociocultural background which entered in the analyses 12 times, and finally, variables related to knowledge of languages entered 4 times in the performed regression analyses. The independent variables related to motivation are the ones that appear to have most influence on students' English proficiency change scores, followed by socio-cultural variables and then knowledge of languages.

According to the results of the analyses performed with the standardized scores it can be observed that the correlations between the English proficiency test and the motivation test are poorer than the ones obtained in the analyses performed with the raw scores. Nevertheless, the highest correlations in this case study are shown in the latter analyses with the standardized scores between variables in the motivation test. Socio-cultural background presents a high correlation with motivation: .8998**, as well as knowledge of languages with motivation: .8992**. Socio-cultural background shows also a high correlation with knowledge of languages (.8328*).

Besides, the analysis of regression shows the factors that may affect motivation, explaining 89.5% of its variance. School is one of the variables that entered in the equation which may explain the important role that the teacher plays on students' motivation. In the matrix of correlations performed with 'school' and the other variables in the English proficiency test and motivation test, a significant correlation was also shown between motivation and school. Socio-cultural background is shown as another factor that considerably affects students' motivation, as well as knowledge of languages and exposure to English.

CONCLUSIONS

In my opinion, great advances have been made in the field of motivation and its effects on second/foreign language acquisition, as the literature on this field in the 80s and early 90s shows.³ However, a great effort should be made to study which factors may affect learner's motivation in a classroom in order to obtain higher degrees of proficiency, since the literature on motivation and its effects on second/foreign language acquisition demonstrates clearly that correlations exist between motivation and language proficiency.

My piece of research makes a small contribution to this field, studying the role of motivation in foreign language acquisition. The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses prove that motivation affects students' foreign language acquisition, and show that the foreign language teacher's personality and his/her way of teaching affect students' motivation.

The quantitative analysis (raw scores) has shown that students with a high motivation correlated with highest improvements between the English proficiency pre-test and post-test. Schools CR and MP are those that present more positive correlations and significance in the ANOVAS because the students in those schools had 'motivating' teachers. In school JM the correlations between students' English proficiency and motivation are negative because they were not motivated. It may be due to the fact of being taught by a 'demotivating' teacher.

As far as the effect of the socio-cultural background of students on their English proficiency is concerned, neither the qualitative nor the quantitative analyses of the raw scores show a great correlation.

Nevertheless, the qualitative and quantitative analyses (raw scores) have shown that the motivational factors are more important than other factors in favouring students' English achievement. Motivation accounts for 48.5% of students' English proficiency.

3.- Au, S.Y., "A critical appraisal of Gardner's social-psychological theory of second-language (L2) learning", *Language Learning*, 38, pp. 75-100, 1988; Baker, C., *Key Issues in Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, (Clevedon, Avon, G.B: Multilingual Matters: 1988); Bernaus, M., "La motivació fa més fàcil l'aprenentatge d'una llengua estrangera", *Papers de Batxillerat*, February 1986, pp. 230-1; Bernaus, M., "Activities that motivate and increase student output", *English Teaching Forum*, January 1987, pp. 45-6; Crookes, G. & Schmidt, R., "Motivation: reopening the research agenda", *Working Papers in ESL*, University of Hawaii, 8,1, pp. 217-256, 1989; Dornyei, Z. "Conceptualizing motivation in foreign language learning", *Language Learning*, 40, pp. 45-78, 1990; Gardner, R.C. "Attitudes and motivation: Their role in second language acquisition", *TESOL Quarterly*, 2, pp. 141-50, 1968; Gardner, R.C., "On the validity of affective variables in second language acquisition: Conceptual, contextual, and statistical considerations", *Language Learning*, 30, pp. 255-70, 1980; Gardner, R.C., "The socio-educational model of second-language learning: Assumptions, findings and issues", *Language Learning*, 38, 1, pp. 101-25, 1988; Oller, J.W. "Gardner on affect: A reply to Gardner", *Language Learning*, 32, 1, pp. 183-9, 1982; Ramage, K. "Motivational factors and persistence in foreign language study", *Language Learning*, 40:2, pp. 189-219, 1990; Strong, M. "Integrative motivation: Cause or result of successful second language acquisition?", *Language learning*, 34, 3, pp. 1-14, 1984.

The multiple regression analyses have explained that motivation has a more specific weight than the other variables because the motivational variables entered in the analyses of regression more times than the other variables in the test. Therefore, one may assume that motivation might be the primary factor affecting learner's foreign language acquisition, followed by learner's socio-cultural background that accounts for 39% of students' English proficiency.

The main conclusion that can be reached after an analysis of the raw data is that motivation is possibly the main factor affecting students' foreign language acquisition, followed by socio-cultural factors. Taking into consideration the analyses of the standardized data I may draw the conclusion that students' socio-cultural background, school/teacher, knowledge of languages, and exposure to English are the variables that mostly affect students' motivation.

I am conscious of the fact that the findings obtained in this study require broader empirical verification, especially the ones related to teachers' personalities and ways of teaching affecting learners' motivation, or students' socio-cultural background affecting motivation. A study that included more schools, teachers and students might yield more reliable results. Nonetheless, I hope that this empirical study has covered the initial objectives, which were to analyze the effects that motivation has on the acquisition of English as a foreign language, on the one hand, and, on the other, to analyze the factors that may affect students' motivation.

After a review of what has been done in the field of motivation and its effects on second/foreign language acquisition, it is clear that more studies on motivation and its better predictors are needed to help foreign language teachers and learners. I hope that in the near future further research will be carried out in this field.