

**The role of the motivation to the learning of speaking skill in the English learning process**

**O papel da motivação para o aprendizado da habilidade oral no processo de aprendizagem de inglês**

Jesiel Soares Silva  
Universidade Federal de Goiás

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is the result of an action research developed in an English language classroom in Language Center of Universidade Federal de Goiás. The research done with students from intermediate level aimed at understanding how the motivation in English language speaking can be reached and what teachers can do in order to keep it. By using interviews, questionnaires, recorded classes; and through a variety of strategies, this study has searched for presenting a wider comprehension of how to motivate English language students in speaking in the target-language.

**KEYWORDS:** Motivation; Speaking skill; English language learning.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo é o resultado de uma pesquisa-ação desenvolvida em uma sala de aula de Língua Inglesa no Centro de Línguas da Universidade Federal de Goiás. A pesquisa feita junto aos alunos do nível intermediário buscou entender como a motivação para fala em língua inglesa pode ser conseguida e o que o professor pode fazer para mantê-la. Através de entrevistas, questionários, aulas gravadas e através do uso de várias estratégias, este estudo buscou uma compreensão mais ampla sobre como motivar os alunos de língua Inglesa a falar na língua-alvo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** Motivação; Habilidade oral; Aprendizagem de língua inglesa.

## **1 Introduction**

When it comes to talk about learning a second language (L2), we must consider a series of procedures which involves theoretical backgrounds and language concepts besides language teaching approaches. Moreover, it deals with methodological processes of organization and pedagogical techniques of applicant. As the process of learning a language involves the interaction among learners from different perspectives, we must be sure that their motivation should be considered in the whole process.

As several studies have shown, motivation is understood as an essential element in the L2 (HEDGE, 2000; KAM, 2002; LITTLEJOHN, 2001; LUMSDEN, 1994; RICHARDS; RENANDYA, 2002). The most part of these studies consider that learners who present a considerable level of motivation are those ones who have more successful language learning.

As Brown (1994, p. 152) observed: “motivation is probably the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task”, and Williams and Burden (1997) broad Brown’s conception presenting the state through cognitive and emotional arousal, and this state would conduct the learner to conscious decision. These decisions, to the authors, would set learners in a realm of intellectual and/or physical effort which would help them to reach some goals.

Once related with language learning, the term motivation represents something not permanent but *multifaceted* and it has been defined in different perspectives through theoretical works in Psychology and other areas (GARDNER, 2005).

By taking these reflections into account and considering the idea that a great percentage of the English language learners studies the language in order to develop their proficiency in the speaking skill, this work aims at analyzing the place of motivation in the English learning as L2 focusing on the oral production of the learners from the Language Center of the Universidade Federal de Goiás.

I have decided to develop this study after perceiving, through informal dialogues, that speaking was the most difficult skill to be improved by students from the Language Center. Furthermore, I noticed that some of them, who had already reached advanced levels, still had limitations in speaking skill. Yet I found out that the great part of beginners had started the course mainly to speak English fluently.

This contradiction has called my attention in two directions: firstly, to the reason which was driving them from *motivated*, at the beginning of the course, to *frustrated* at the end. Secondly, how I as teacher could help them to achieve their goal and sustain their motivation in speaking by applying teaching strategies. To do so, I proposed three research questions: Which strategies chosen are better to make them motivated to speak? How do they react toward tasks I applied? Which activities make them more uninhibited to speak in the target language?

Besides this introduction, this paper contains a theoretical overview on motivation and its application on language learning, and also some considerations on the speaking skill. It is also presented a brief review on action-research, its importance to English teachers and its relevance to research in English language learning. After that, data are analyzed and finally some final considerations about the study.

## **2 Theoretical background on motivation and speaking skill**

If we look up in the dictionary<sup>1</sup> the meaning of “motivate” and “speak”, we will find to the former: “to make somebody want to do something, especially something that involves hard work and effort”; and to the latter: “to talk to somebody about something; have a conversation”. When we mingle both meanings and add the context of language learning, we have several aspects to weigh. First of all, we have to know what motivation is and how it can interfere in the language learning process, especially on the speaking skill.

### **2.1 Learners’ motivation: where does it come from?**

Let’s evoke what MacIntyre’s *et al* (2001, p. 462) have affirmed in order to firstly justify why dealing with motivation in the educational process: “motivation represents one of the most appealing, yet complex, variables used to explain individual differences in language learning”. What is reaped from this definition is the multifaceted feature of motivation; therefore, it would be ingenuousness to seek for a simple pattern of comprehension which involves everything that comes along with it. Brown (1994) states that motivation has to do with choices made by people in order to set the goals they will seek and how much effort they will spend on it.

According to Gardner (2006), as well as difficult to propose a single concept of motivation, it is not easy to state a simple definition of what it is meant to learning an L2. To the author, given the complexity of both motivation and language learning processes, the former should be understood as an intense interest in learning specific skills to specific reasons. To put it in a nutshell, Dörnyei (2003, p. 73) points that:

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 7th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

The motivated individual expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires and aspirations, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions concerning success and or failure, is aroused, and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals.

There are a considerable number of works that deals with the motivation's complexity into L2 learning (e.g. GARDNER, 2006, SHUMIN, 2002, MASGORET; GARDNER, 2003); yet the teacher's role in the process is not in the kernel of these discussions, since the teacher appears as a cog in the learning wheel and the whole of efforts is concentrate in the learner's issues.

Lumsden (1994, p. 17) had ever brought out that question when he stated that motivation to learn is a competence acquired "through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant others (especially parents and teachers)."

Through these questions we can perceive that what lies at the center of the discussion is that motivation to learn is a complex process which involves the attitude, the affective issues, behaviors and all of these factors are linked in the construction and maintenance of motivation.

If we consider these questions in the L2 learning, everyone would easily agree that learners who are motivated to learn a language may get better results than those who do not. However, it is not as simple as it seems to be, since there are an amount of issues to be considered.

If we turn back to the teacher's role, we may assume that teachers can act as a mediator in the process of developing learners' positive motivation by making the classroom itself an able-to-experience-success environment, a fertile ground for knowledge production, and a place where learners' voice can be heard.

To systematize the process of motivation in the language learning it is firstly necessary to put it in two different concepts: intrinsic and extrinsic. Both concepts can be briefly exemplified in this way: if someone wants to learn English just because he wants to travel abroad or to pass in an exam, we could say he is extrinsically motivated. On the other

side, if the idea of learning a language creates some kind of interest and the reason for learning a language has to do with the language learning itself, he is intrinsically motivated.

There is a sense that teachers' role is closer to the intrinsic motivation, since it is up to them to manage the class, and to provide an environment that facilitates the increasing of learners' intrinsic motivation. However, teacher can also interfere in the learners' extrinsic motivation, for example, by giving positive feedback to the learners' attempt to speak in the class and being what Lumsden (1994, p. 17) has called "significant other".

It is important to point out that we are not naming the teacher as the responsible for making learners intrinsically motivated, but he can create specific situations in which learner would feel more comfortable to use the target language. In *table 1* it is given some categories to define intrinsic motivation.

TABLE 1 - Reasons that promote intrinsic motivation<sup>2</sup>.

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Description</i>
Challenge	People are best motivated when they are working toward personally meaningful goals whose attainment requires activity at a continuously optimal (intermediate) level of difficulty.
Curiosity	Something in the physical environment attracts the learner's attention or there is an optimal level of discrepancy between present knowledge or skills and what these could be if the learner engaged in some activity.
Control	People have a basic tendency to want to control what happens to them.
Competition	Learners feel satisfaction by comparing their performance favorably to that of others.
Cooperation	Learners feel satisfaction when others recognize and appreciate their accomplishments.

If we take a look at the last two reasons presented, we will see the influence of others in learner's intrinsic motivation, it means, the ideas of comparing and sharing are important in the learners' intrinsic motivation. Thus, teachers must be prepared to deal with the interaction among his learners and make them work collaboratively in order to increase their intrinsic motivation.

These discussions on motivation to L2 language learning, especially the idea of intrinsic motivation and the teacher's role, were thought in this work inside the speaking skill

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from  
<[http://education.calumet.purdue.edu/Vockell/EdPsyBook/Edpsy5/Edpsy5\\_intrinsic.htm](http://education.calumet.purdue.edu/Vockell/EdPsyBook/Edpsy5/Edpsy5_intrinsic.htm)>.  
Accessed in 15/11/2010.

process in the language learning. In this study, as mentioned, we aimed at understanding the place of motivation in the speaking skill, and, through the action-research, motivating learners to speak in the target language. Therefore, it is necessary to take a brief overview on the speaking skill issues.

## **2.2 Speaking: listening to learners' voice through verbal interaction**

It is a common sense among a lot of people that a great percentage of the language learners study English as L2 in order to develop proficiency in speaking, and sometimes the success of the language learner has to do with his ability to communicate by speaking in the target language (NUNAN, 1991).

Even agreeing, we cannot take it as a simple idea, since the teaching speaking skill in the L2 learning process is a very complex task which involves many theories and strategies that we, as teachers, have to go through in order to improve our teaching and to make learners more confident to speak. It involves our role in helping them to: take risks, not be afraid of committing mistakes, and above all, keep them motivated to speak in the L2.

To begin with, speaking is used for many different purposes, and each purpose involves different skills. We may use speaking to describe things, to complain about people's behavior, to make polite requests, or to entertain people with jokes. Each of these different purposes for speaking implies knowledge of the rules that account for how spoken language reflects the context or situation in which speech occurs.

Lerris (2003, p. 58) goes further: "speaking is a chance to notice the gaps between what you want to say and what you can say; it is a chance to test hypotheses about language", however this must not be seen as an individually-done work. When one speaks in the class, there is supposed to be a listener, who possibly speaks back in a dialogical process.

Nunan (1991, p. 58) shares the same idea and affirms that speaking in the language learning must be defined as an interactional process through which "the interlocutors negotiate meaning in order to achieve their communicative ends". By *interlocutors* we can deduce the teacher and the other learners. This thought drives us to a realm of communicative construction among the speakers. Shumin (2002, p. 208) deals with this idea by bringing the teacher's role up:

Communication in the classroom is embedded in meaning-focused activity. This requires teachers to tailor their instruction carefully to the needs of learners and teach them how to listen to others, how to talk with others, and how to negotiate meaning in a shared context.

Based on the idea that: first, teaching speaking skill in an L2 involves oral interaction between learners-learners and learners-teachers (LERRIS, 2003); and second, this is a process extremely related to how learner are motivated to speak, we conclude that “learning to speak in a second or foreign language will be facilitated when learners are actively engaged in attempting to communicate (NUNAN, 1991, p. 61).

On speaking in L2 as a process interactively constructed, Shumin (2002) says that it is especially difficult because involves factors which affect adult L2 learners’ oral communication such as: age or maturational constraints, sociocultural and affective factors. To Oxford (1990, p. 140), the affective factor “is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure”.

As I have already mentioned, the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many L2 learners. Learners consequently often measure their success in language learning according to how well they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. Based on these discussions, this action-research was proposed to identify strategies, alternatives and tasks conducted by the teacher in order to construct, together with learners, their motivation to speak in L2.

### **3 The research: acting on the own practice**

Based on this discussion about motivation and speaking skill this work presents an action-research developed by me, as an English teacher, with a group of English Language learners from Language Center of Universidade Federal de Goiás.

We can say that the action research has the practice as the fundamental element in its constitution. When starts an action research, the teacher seeks for guide his action by the practice in the classroom and aims at bettering his work as teacher. This kind of research is known as a no theory-guided procedure because it is known as *knowing in action* (BURNS, 1999; GREENWOOD; LEVIN, 2006).

According to Burns (1999), the action-research is developed and conducted by the data collected by the participants inside specific situations of teaching, on the contrary of others conceptions that elect the research orientation through external investigations, preventing from generalize the context.

At the time of the research learners were at English 5 in a scale that comes from 1 to 8, therefore it corresponds to the intermediate level. This study was composed by me, as teacher-researcher together with 7 English language learners.

The research of divided in two moments: first, I applied a questionnaire and made an interview in order to know about their motivation to speak in English, how motivation they were at the time and, in their opinion, what activities ad tasks would help them to speak more. Second I applied some activities which were prepared especially considering what they had informed. These classes were recorded in order to understand how it was, or was not, useful to learner's motivation to speak in the target language.

To the research, it was considered three classes of 1 hour and 40 minutes each. During these classes, I applied speaking activities in order to develop their proficiency and, mainly, their motivation to speak in English. To direct the activities chosen to be applied, besides learner's points of view, I made use of some Littlejohn's (2001) ideas on motivation in language teaching:

a) *Experiment, take risks*: I made use of different tasks in the speaking classes to see how students reacted toward each one. For example, small dialogues with them, pieces of movies, songs, grammar exercises, simple questions about daily routines, among others.

b) *Choose 'larger' tasks*: I applied specific activities aiming at giving students more 'psychological space' to plan their speech, set their own pace, and make their own decisions about how and what they would speak out.

c) *Provide choice*: If people are involved in deciding what to do, they are usually more committed to it and more confident to speak. Instead of saying 'do this', I said, for example 'you can choose your pair or group' or "If you would like to do something else, ask me.'

The questionnaire and the interview I applied were kept in Portuguese in order to avoid misunderstanding and not to turn the language into a barrier to communication. I asked them objective and subjective questions about motivation in speaking. The speaking classes



were recorded in order to give more details about my behavior as a teacher and to give more information about their motivation during the classes.

I prepared specific speaking activities in order to perceive how they were or not motivated to speak in English. I collected the data between September and November of 2009 according to the classes I gave. The learners' names were replaced to Student 1, 2, etc. (S1, S2) in order to preserve their identities.

TABLE 2 – Information about the students

<b>Student</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>S7</b>
<b>Gender</b>	male	male	male	male	female	female	female
<b>Age</b>	24	29	23	27	24	23	19

#### **4 A brief look at data: reaping the harvest**

As I have already mentioned, a language learner can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. It means that the reasons which make them motivated or not motivated to use the target language during the classes may be affected by internal or external reasons. One of the questions from the questionnaire I applied was about what kind of activities would make them more motivated to speak in English, for example in pairs, alone, in group. In the following excerpt, we have some of their answers about this question.

Excerpt 1

Depende muito, não da atividade em si, mas de mim. Às vezes a atividade é bem boa e me dá vontade de falar. Me sinto bem falando em outra língua e algumas atividades me levam a falar. Mas bom mesmo é quando o professor fala “very good”, “excellent”, nesses casos me sinto muito melhor para falar em Inglês, porque parece que estou indo muito bem. (S5 – Questionnaire)

When S5 writes that she feels much better when teacher says “very good” or “excellent” it brings up a very interesting discussion about what kind of motivation is better in a whole process of language learning.

This fragment carries us back to Lumdsen’s (1994) idea of the “significant other”. We can notice the importance of the feedback given by the teacher to S5’s motivation to

speak in target-language. Although, it is raised another question: how much should teachers stimulate the students with positive feedback? Would not be such attitude harmful? Would not learners become dependent of good words from teacher to be motivated?

The reason through which is difficult to answer these questions lies in the complexity of the motivational process discussed previously. In each context, teachers must get in touch with learners' perspectives to the English class in order to at least map the possibilities to work on their motivation to speak.

In the following two excerpts it is easily perceivable the intrinsic and the extrinsic motivation consecutively displayed. S1 and S3 track different motivational ways to speak English. This is an example of why it is so necessary to teacher developing action-research. It means, by applying a research in his own practice, teacher can broadly know learners' perspectives and motivation-to-speak level. Furthermore, teacher can search for alternatives of bettering his actuation in order to reach learners' goals.

Excerpt 2

**Teacher:** (...) mas me diz aí, o que é necessário acontecer para que você se sinta motivado, com vontade de falar em Inglês?

**S3:** Olha na verdade sou muito cruel comigo mesmo, entendeu? tipo assim, eu acho que tudo depende só de mim, quer dizer, eu tenho que querer a coisa, lutar por ela e não é fácil, entendeu? Não gosto de ficar falando que é a aula, o colégio, nesse caso curso, ou professor, entende? Depende de mim da minha garra, sei lá.

Excerpt 3

**Teacher:** Então, você disse que faz Inglês porque tem propósito, certo?

**S4:** É isso.

**Teacher:** Entendi. Mas o que isso tem a ver com a sua motivação para falar Inglês, assim...

**S4:** Então, é isso. Tem tudo a ver. Eu quero falar Inglês bem porque quero fazer um "interchange" fora, de Química, e lá vou ter que falar só em Inglês então não tem saída. Por isso sou tão interessado em falar em Inglês muito.

Firstly, S3 seems to concentrate the reasons for his level of development in English language in his own effort. It makes us remember the first reason displayed in *table 1*. When challenges himself, one can self-provoke a higher motivation to speak. S3 uses ideas such as self-interest and willpower to describe his process of speaking motivation.

S3 seems to be on the other way from Lumdsen's (1994) idea that motivation depends of stimulus from the others, since of being motivated to S3 is a predominant inner process. On the other side, he agrees with Dörnyei's (2003) concept in the idea of the self-effort to get things done and self-confidence in the result.

S3's conception of motivation has two sides of the same coin. The best one is that he is a hard-working student, and in a no-teacher environment he would do it very well. The bad one is that by concentrating all results in his own effort, disappointments would be much more harmful, because he would blame only himself for bad results.

Under another perspective, S4 seems to justify his motivation to speak in English in external factors. He has a specific purpose in studying English which is extrinsically situated. It can drive us to the understanding that the key to keep S4 motivated is not strictly related with teacher, colleagues or institution; since, once his level of motivation is going awry, he can think on why he *needs* to speak that language, and for what it will be used (GARDNER, 2006).

As presented in *table 1*, the last two reasons that promote intrinsic motivation are *competition* and *cooperation*. Twice of them are deeply connected with the interaction as a way to construct the learners' motivation. In the questionnaire I applied, learners were told to answer how much their classmates influenced them to be motivated in the speaking skill. In the following excerpt it is evident the idea of competition:

Excerpt 4

Influenciam muito. Primeiro porque gosto de superar outros alunos, até no meu curso mesmo. Depois porque me sinto bem quando tiro a melhor nota. Sei que isso não parece saudável, mas gosto de ser sempre o melhor na sala. Pelo menos me sentir o melhor. E também às vezes acho que tem que ser assim mesmo. Sou assim. (S2 – Questionnaire)

S2 shows that the interaction with other learners conducts him to a level of competition which keeps him motivated. Teachers must know how to conduct this kind of learner and propose activities that stimulate the competition. However, it has to be clear that competition is not to create and hierarchy between these ones who speak more and those ones who speak less. Everything must be thought to promote an environment in which the whole group feels free to speak.

Thinking about this question of interaction among them, and considering their own view on their attitudes toward the speaking during the classes, I asked learners, through the questionnaire, if they considered themselves as a person who used to make a regularly use of the target language in the class. By having a look at the answers we can see the heterogeneity of the group when they talk about themselves.

According to American Association of School Administrators (1999), a heterogeneous classroom is one that reflects the rich diversity of students. Rather than grouping learners based on their ability or achievement, a heterogeneous classroom has to do with students' differences in age, sex, race, ability, and achievement. In the heterogeneous classroom, the perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds of all students must be considered for enriching learning. As students collaborate, each individual has the opportunity to contribute. Everyone learns from everyone else. In the following excerpts there are some examples of this heterogeneity:

Excerpt 5

Os meus amigos da sala contribuem muito, até porque eles sabem mais que eu, então nas horas que eu não sei eles me ajudam, é muito bom. Por exemplo, quando tem atividades de pares eu sempre fico com quem sabe mais aí ele me ajuda. (S7 – Questionnaire)

Excerpt 6

Não mesmo. Eu só falo quando o professor pergunta e olha lá. (S4 – Questionnaire)

Excerpt 7

Eu poderia falar mais, mas sou ansioso e lento. Quando eu estou elaborando a resposta alguém já respondeu. Eu poderia falar mais. (S1 – Questionnaire)

Excerpt 8

Eu fico sem graça porque quando vou falar parece que ninguém me entende, nem o professor. Quando os outros alunos falam todo mundo entende, dá até discussão. (S6 – Questionnaire)

S7 highlights the importance of her colleagues in her speaking skill during the interactions and how pair activity helps her to be motivated to speak. It brings up the idea that

teachers must propose group activities and avoid speaking tasks in which the knowledge is built collectively.

On the other side, S4 seems to be over dependant from teacher's instructions. He is not motivated to use the target language with his colleagues and his spoken moments seem to concentrate in what he *has* to speak, not in what he *can* speak. In the following excerpt, S3 and I were talking about factor what made him motivated to speak in English:

Excerpt 9

**Teacher:** Se pensarmos assim, numa escala de significância, por exemplo, qual fator é mais importante pra te motivar a falar em Inglês nas aulas, por exemplo, o professor, você mesmo, a eminência de uma viagem ao exterior, seus colegas de sala, o material de aula, quer dizer, o material didático, a vontade de falar em Inglês ou outros diferentes?

**S3:** Na verdade eu acho que é um pouquinho de cada. Você falou aí da viagem, mas o motivo não pode ser só esse, sabe? Quer dizer, é uma língua nova, um mundo novo, isso já é muito bom. Eu por exemplo não vou “travel abroad”, mas quero muito me tornar fluente, sei lá, porque é, sabe? Só pela língua mesmo...

**Teacher:** Sei. Então você considera a língua, tipo, bonita, interessante?

**S3:** Na verdade nem é isso, sabe? Português é mais bonito, mas Inglês é importante no mundo, como posso dizer, é um trunfo que a gente tem, tipo, quando eu falo Inglês eu me sinto meio que dentro do mundo sabe? E parece que ler, sei lá..escrever não é a mesma intensidade. É bom entender e falar, tipo assim, sem parar, sabe? Direto

**Teacher:** Ah, tá..E você se sente motivado pra falar Inglês durante as aulas?

**S3:** Olha, pra ser sincero, só quando você trás uns temas bons, interessantes, porque aquelas coisas de “Who wrote that song” ou então “what did you do yesterday” eu não aguento. (S3 – Interview)

There are two possibilities to analyze S3's words about reasons what motivate him to speak in the target language. First, he seems to be intrinsically motivated when he mention that the reason for him to speak lies in the speaking and in the language themselves (DÖRNYEI, 2003). It shows a kind of fascination about the language that sometime can be useful in the process of to be motivated to speak. Second, he mention the teacher's role in providing task, activities and classes that prove learner's interest.

Clearly, we see the importance of the teacher as a researcher in the learners' motivational process. It means, when research their own practice and look for comprehending learners' preferences, teachers can take it into account when they prepare speaking class activities.

On the other side, we, as teachers, can face situations in which learners seem not to be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to speak the language. In his interview, S4 shows a low level of motivation in speaking and deals with it as an English course obligation:

Excerpt 10

**Teacher:** Pra você o que é mais importante, relevante, pra te motivar a falar em Inglês nas aulas, por exemplo, seu esforço, o professor, viajar para o exterior, só a vontade de falar a língua ou outros diferentes?

**S4:** Olha, pra ser sincero, acho que nada. (sorriso).

**Teacher:** Mas assim, alguma coisa que...

**S4:** Não, eu sei, mas é que não sou tão empolgado em falar outra língua, o Português já me dá muito trabalho sabe? E outra, não vou viajar, nem fazer doutorado no exterior, sei lá, comecei estudar inglês naturalmente, numa sequência sabe? Pré-vestibular, curso de Inglês, faculdade, nem pensei muito, pra mim é só uma matéria sei lá.

**Teacher:** Mas você se sente motivado para usar a língua durante...

**S4:** Não, não, já fui mais empolgado, agora quero terminar logo, sabe? Só pra dizer que eu fiz, mas eu falo até bem, mas fico estranho falando Inglês, não gosto muito.

S3 as well as S4 at the research time were studying at the same level and they had a similar proficiency in speaking, but their different levels of motivation are totally clear. This heterogeneity is a very big challenge to language teacher, because you are required to have a heterogeneous attitude too.

Teachers who just teach to their own preferred learning style are only able to reach a portion of their students, letting the others alone. This way, teachers must consider the differences by planning thematic units and doing action research in order to take a classroom overview, and provide tasks that consider the diversity.

## 5 Activities and results

After have a look at learner's opinion about the process of their motivation to speak based on data I had collected (interview and questionnaire), I elaborated some speaking activities in order to make them more motivated to speak in the class room. In the following part the results of these activities will be analyzed through some fragments from class recordings.

### Activity one

I gave them some pieces of cartoons, a different cartoon to each student. Then, I asked them to explain to the whole group if and why it was funny. The main goal was stimulating their speaking with something funny instead of grammatical tasks of large texts (common in some pedagogical material). In figure 2 we can see an example of one those cartoons:



Figure 1 – Available at: <http://www.4allfree.com/>

At that activity, this previous cartoon belonged to S7 and in next excerpt there is a fragment of the interaction. As we can see, almost all students had taken part in the discussion and the idea expressed in the cartoon seems to motivate them to speak in English:

Excerpt 11

**Teacher:** So, **S7**, could you show us the cartoon and tell us why it is so funny?

**S7:** (risos) It's very funny, teacher...we have two..âh..old robbers, I don't know talking about the others guys who are robbers too...but in a different way...

**Teacher:** What do you mean by different way?

**S7:** Well...how can I explain...OK! When they was...were robbers at long time ago...they used to steal real things, you know? Like real robbers...do you understand me? (asking to the teacher)

**S1:** You're so funny...REAL robbers?? (risos) maybe they are from other school.

**S7:** Yeah...maybe...and now the crimes are so...how can I say...superficial...because invade a security system is not a crime... (everybody talking at the same time)

**S6:** Ah...Ok...say it to FBI...

**S2:** No...No...it's not necessary go to United States, I heard that in Guapó...here in Goiás they...eh...arrested a guy who...eh...invaded the system.

**S4:** Guapó? There are no computers in Guapó...it's the "roça"  
(todo mundo rindo ao mesmo tempo)

We can perceive that, although I started asking the question, the students who was supposed to answer did not do it alone, almost everybody took part, even when some of them just laughed and said "yes" or "no" or "I don't think so", they kept practicing the activity and trying to speak in English.

We can see that **S7** seems to be motivated to speak and spreads it to the others. When they started to talk, I as a teacher, just let them go wherever they want and I believe that when we have a situation in which students are engaged to speak, even when they change the topic, the best idea is just let them speak.

Lerris (2003) identifies three types of interaction: besides learner-instructor and learner-learner, the author presents the learner-content interaction. Learner-content interaction is essential to the educational process. By interacting with the subject, learners show their idea about the world, about their way of perceiving things. This can be very useful to the teacher



when he prepares the English classes, especially that ones about speaking skill. In the next figure there is another cartoon and the same activity:



Figure 2 – Available at: <http://www.4allfree.com/>

In the following excerpt, there is a fragment of an interaction between S6 and me. We can note that, differently from the previous fragment, S6 seems no be motivated to speak in the English language and often turn it into Portuguese. Even when she is told answer specific questions, she refuses. We can see how complex is the teacher's work inside a group with so highlighted differences.

Excerpt 12

**Teacher:** Now...you, please...show us and tell us why is it funny?

**S6:** She is...how can I say...giving it back, because the bird repeats everything, that's all.

**Teacher:** But...what's the problem? Why couldn't she stay with the parrot?

**S6:** Because of the children . OK! "Tá bom, não vou falar mais"

**Teacher:** Why not..? Do you have a pet..like a bird?

**S6:** No.

**Teacher:** Don't you like animals?

**S6:** No, teacher, “eu não gosto de ficar falando...toda hora...”

We can see a situation in which the learner is not motivated to speak, even having enough understanding of English language and some vocabulary. In these situations teachers are up against a brick wall and must look for alternatives to maintain the dialogue. The same activity was practiced in a totally different way in the same group.

This is an example of heterogeneous group. Another issue to be considered: while S6 was talking to me, (the teacher) nobody spoke with us, it means that everybody seemed to know their colleagues and they did not speak with someone who did not want too.

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### **Activity two**

In this activity I played a video recorded from *YouTube*. This video was a piece of a debate between Barack Obama and John McCain<sup>3</sup> and the main purpose was let them speak about the main ideas discussed, the language both Obama and McCain were using (formal) and the pronunciation. In the next excerpt there is a discussion ob the debate they had just watched:

Excerpt 13

**Teacher:** Ok...ok...(to everybody) how was it? Could you get something from what they were discussing about?

**S1:** Teacher...can I?

**Teacher:** Of course..please...go on...

**S1:** Well, I believe that...ãã..at this moment, Obama’s much more prepared to lead U.S, don’t you think? I believe on it because he...how can I say...he represents something different from the others, he is bringing with him, the poverty, the...starvation..is it?

**Teacher:** Yeah...go on...

**S1:** ...and the republicans represent the upper class, don’t they? If Americans elect a black guy, democrat...and with Hussein in his name, it’s gonna be a great change, isn’t it? And we can see in this

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOhtn0SreV8>, accessed in 26/10/09

debate...that...Obama is more calm...you know? He seems to know that it is his time...

The first thing to be noticed is the S1's attitude toward the task. He is motivated to talk about the video and we can deduce that it happened thanks to his interest for politics. We can get some political knowledge from his speech. However, this activity about the American political situation was not a unanimous idea, as it is easily noticed in the next excerpt:

Excerpt 14

**Teacher:** You...could you tell us about things you got from the debate?

**S4:** Just a little...bit. I do not like to pay attention on this programs...it's so boring for me...you know? Can be Obama, can be the other...they will steal all the money from Americans...I do not care...

**Teacher:** But do you believe that this election can influence us, I mean, our country?

**S4:** I don't know, Lula is so "fraquinho"...he will open the legs to United States..as ever...as ever...

**Teacher:** And...

**S4:** Teacher, "vamo falá de coisa que vale a pena...esquece os obamas da vida..." (rindo)

It is clear that S4 is not interested in talking about politics and it contributes to be less motivated in using the target language. Even when I insisted in the talking, S4 seem to end the conversation.

By analyzing these previous excerpts we can see that, first, S4 is not motivated to speak in English because of the topic; it does not seem to be interesting to him although it was the most spoken subject at that time. Second, S1 seems to be more aware of global concerns, politic and it could make the speech easier. Anyway, these heterogeneity demands a more complex work from teachers.

## 6 Final considerations

Through this study I found numerous benefits, including increased understanding of myself. I could perceive how motivation is important in English class. Once motivated,

learners can conceive the classroom as a comfortable place to speak in the target language. Remembering what Brown (1994) said, the learners' level of motivation is what defines the success or the failure in the tasks. As we saw in the data, some of learners were motivated toward the activities because it dealt with something of his/her interest.

As data have shown one of the best strategies to make learners motivated and keep them motivated are those ones that involve cultural information, or funny stuff like cartoons and jokes. I still found out that resources like videos are as an ace up teacher's sleeve to motivate learner to speak. However is must be clear that each context brings its difference and the tasks may be different. That is why is so important for teachers to research their own practices.

The *multifaceted* feature of motivation well underpinned by Gardner (2005) is easily noticed in the data. It is not easy dealing with this complexity in the L2 learning process, especially in a heterogeneous group. However, this challenge must be faced by teachers, since it is possible to promote an environment favorable to a meaningful learning and a place in which learners will feel free to speak.

We saw that the idea "significant other" proposed by Lumdsen (1994) was important in teacher-learner interactions. The way teacher conducts the interaction and is essential to coax a good speaking performance out of his pupils. Instead of keep the learners at arm's length, teacher must get involved in the interactional process, since the understanding of how an interaction-driven class should be given is crucial to a better practice on speaking skill teaching.

The teachers' role in the process of construction of the learners' motivation is of mediating the process and providing chances to learners speaking. We are not saying that learners' motivation should be under the auspices of teacher; however the process has to be constructed cooperatively.

Through the interviews, questionnaires and the class recording, they showed me that almost all of them believe that speaking in the target language is determinant in the language learning process, even those who were not highly motivated to speak. That is why it is important working on learners' motivation to speaking, since learners are able to express their ideas in a dialogue. It means, they can refuse, agree, quest a person at the same time this person is talking.

After the action-research developed, I reinforce that teachers must investigate their practice because you can deal systematically with problems and seek for solving them in a better way. Of course, it is not an easy task because there are a lot of obstacles in the way and sometimes we want to bail out this journey. But we must keep bashing away aiming at bettering our practices and consequently our learners' language skills.

By listening to students' voice through the research, teacher can feel their anxiety, frustrations, and problems and work on it together with them. I totally agree of what Shumin (2002) has proposed about the teacher's role in the process of motivation. It is necessary to listen to students, understand their interests and propose tasks that achieve their goals in speaking skill.

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