

How Does Motivation to Learn a Second Language Differ from Other Performance Skill Motivation?

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While extensive testing has been carried out on motivation as a factor in second language learning, considerable work still needs to be done to accurately measure and explain its function. I categorize learning a second language as a performance skill and suggest that *motivation* to learn a second language is significantly different from motivation affecting other performance skills. Viewing second language motivation from this perspective can add new insight into research whose aim is to define, and increase motivation, in students.

Humans speak to each other through language -- a system of vocal sounds and combinations of sounds to which we attach meaning. The brain does not handle language as one large, amorphous task, but rather, delegates certain areas to handle particular language tasks. It is usually when an injury to the brain occurs, such as Broca's aphasia or a stroke, that linguists and physicians have been able to pinpoint which part of language ability is affected.

Just as the language faculty is different from other human faculties, factors that impact on language may themselves be language specific, and particular to the language faculty itself.

In many respects, learning a first language is an unconscious act. Children simply use the faculties of speech and language they have at their disposal. To be successful, however, learning a first language must be triggered by input from external sources, e.g., we must first hear (or see) others speaking to, and around, us before we can emulate their behavior. All human children, barring physical and mental barriers, or deprivation and abuse, learn a first language.

Children (for the most part, before puberty) also successfully learn a second or third language if their exposure to these languages meets the same learning conditions as their first language. Most adults, however, fail to achieve native-like second language competency, even after expending tremendous effort to do so. Some linguists ascribe the fact that children learn a second language more successfully to possibly their having the luxury of much more time to practice than adults (Bialystok, 1994). Why children gain native-like competence more often than adults has yet to be fully explained.

There is no doubt that motivation plays a significant role in successful adult second language acquisition. Next to aptitude, it is widely considered the most important affective factor influencing second language acquisition; it is "consistently the most successful predictor of language learning success" (Skehan, 1989, p. 26). Just as aptitude to learn a second language correlates specifically to language, I suggest that the

motivation that drives adults to successfully learn a second language is also language specific and arguably distinct from motivation that affects other human performance skills.

Canadian researcher Robert C. Gardner, a pioneer in his field, has conducted numerous experiments on the role of second language motivation. For more than 35 years, Gardner has made the scientific measurement of motivation (as well as other affective variables, such as attitude and anxiety) his prime concern and has written prolifically on the topic. The findings of Gardner and Wallace Lambert (in Gardner's early research) still serve as the basis for ongoing studies. It is the motivation research of Gardner that I will principally comment on, and to a lesser degree, studies on motivation by other researchers.

In groundbreaking work with English-speakers learning French in Canada, Gardner and Lambert made several important claims: that motivation can be *integrative*, "where the aim in language study is to learn more about the language group, or to meet more and *different* people"; or *instrumental*, "where the reasons reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement" (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, p. 267). They further state that the "integratively oriented students are generally more successful in acquiring French than those who are instrumentally oriented." (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, p. 271). Writing later, they state that "The language student must be willing to adopt appropriate features of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic community" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p. 14).

While the instrumentally motivated learner's commitment can wane if the utilitarian aspect of learning a second language disappears -- such as temporary need, financial reward, or political expediency -- the integratively oriented learner is seen to be much more strongly committed to the learning process. Because this kind of learner is less influenced by outside expedient forces that could derail progress in learning a second language, I will concentrate mainly on the motivation that affects the integratively motivated learner.

Interestingly, Gardner and Lambert were not the first to hypothesize that first language learning is motivated by a desire to identify with a member of the new language group. Mowrer theorized that a first language is learned because a child wants to be like a valued member of the family, and later the whole language community (Mowrer, 1950). Gardner and Lambert's early work models second language motivation on Mowrer's theory, stating that "achievement in a second language is dependent upon essentially the same type of motivation that is apparently necessary for the child to learn his first language" (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, p. 267).

Identifying with this new culture involves the adoption of another mindset. In other words, "The successful learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p. 3). Not only is the lexicon of the new language completely different, but expressions and idioms have to be recast in a new way. Concepts that the learner knows in his first language may not apply to the new language. To my knowledge, no other human pursuit demands that the learner assume such a complete psychological (and phonological) transformation in order to achieve success. I have even had bilingual friends say to me that they feel that their personality changes when they switch from one language to another, so complete is the psychological transformation!

It is obvious from observing those who speak a second language that these speakers have *re-learned* a skill that they already possessed. In order to achieve mastery comparable to the first language, they have had to construct a parallel system of thinking and speaking. By adopting a multitude of characteristics of the new language group, these speakers eventually reconstructed, or duplicated, the ability they possessed in the first language. To use railroad imagery, the first and second languages are two rails that run parallel to each other on which the speaker rides, with the transformational concepts from first to second language serving as ties that connect the two rails. The parallelism aspect of the two languages seems to support Gardner and Lambert's position that second language acquisition is dependent on, or at least seems to copy, the motivation found in first language acquisition.

In contrast to learning a second language, all other skill acquisition is first-time acquisition; the learner is laying down a one-rail track that does not duplicate an existing one.

It is not a far stretch to assume, then, that motivation to succeed at such a unique human activity as re-learning a basic tool -- language -- must itself be unique from other skill demanding a considerable investment of time and effort.

We can safely say that learning a second language is an accomplishment of the highest order. Since it is also apparent that all accomplishments are not equal in their purpose nor in the amount of effort required for success, it would be helpful for our discussion to divide accomplishments into two categories: *achievements* and *performance skills*. *Achievements* are based on practical, external considerations, such as losing weight, building a house, or launching a business while *performance skills* are based on personal excellence in execution, such as athletics, dance, drama, music and the mastery of a second language.

Mastery of a sport demands tremendous physical discipline. The body is trained to perform physically challenging acts that push it to the edge of what is humanly possible. Motivation to reach that point is fueled by competition, since the desire to be the best strongly drives its performance. Although it brings satisfaction to the performer, excelling at a sport is generally not a solitary pursuit that is done just for the athlete's sole pleasure. There has to be some outside measure against which the athlete can compete. By the same token, dance can be as physically demanding as athletics. Motivation to pursue excellence in dance combines intense interpretative feelings with the desire to be the best interpreter of those feelings. Playing an instrument well shares the same kind of competitive motivation to interpret feelings inherent in dance.

In two other performance skills, singing and drama, language plays an indispensable role. Manipulating one's voice to produce beautiful sound through music and words that convey human experience commands the greatest respect and admiration from others. Here again, motivation to express one's innermost feelings through language and music is an important factor in the skill.

Upon careful consideration, it would seem that all performance skills have one thing in common: they are accomplishments for which a public gauge of success is necessary in order to deem them successful. After all, performers *perform* -- not in isolation -- but before an audience. Dancers, singers, and second language speakers are deemed proficient not because *they* consider themselves so, but because others recognize that they have reached certain standards of proficiency. Motivation to succeed in these performance skills, therefore, is significantly bound with the desire to excel before an audience.

It is axiomatic that performers seek public approval of their uniqueness; they seek to stand out from the ordinary; to be distinguishable from the crowd. In this respect, however, motivation to succeed in a second language is uniquely different from that of other performance skills.

As we have seen from Mowrer and Gardner and Lambert, second language motivation derives from a desire to identify completely with a new language community; to be integrated so fully that one becomes indiscernible from the native speaker population. A second language learner strives *not* to stand out, *not* to be different, since that would indicate less than successful acquisition. Motivation for success in a second language seems, therefore, to stem from an entirely different base than involved in the acquisition of other performance skills.

There also is a conspicuous lack of competition motivating second language learning compared to the competitive drive in other performance skills. Whereas dancers and musicians compete for recognition against others in their field, who does a second language speaker compete against except herself? She does not try to outdo native speakers because she knows she will never equal them; the most she can hope for is "near native" skill.

When we further analyze performance skills, another aspect marks second language acquisition as different from other performance skills. All performance skills, except execution of a second language, are specific acts realized within a specific time frame. Singers don't sing all the time, nor do athletes engage in sports all the time. There are times when performers are "on call" and times when they are not. But with a second language, the speaker is always "on call" because, put in a situation where the second language (French) is being used, they must always speak French, or risk not being understood. There is no such thing as down-time (except when no language is being spoken). Therefore, motivation to learn a skill where one must be *always* ready to respond with the skill is different from motivation where one can choose not to perform.

When we consider also that to perform is to make a conscious effort, that it requires total concentration in order to execute the skill, we can see how second language acquisition again is unique in that it does not require manifest concentration on the act of speaking to speak well. In fact, learning a second language to near-native status means submerging the language into the subconscious so that the speaker really does not have to think analytically about what she wants to say. She says it "naturally" -- as easily as she would say it in her first language. In contrast to an athlete or singer, a person speaking a second language is not conscious that she is speaking a second language. She is just "talking".

It is regrettably true, that as the body ages, performance skills suffer. This happens even when the opportunities to perform are still present. After a period of excellence, the ability to perform deteriorates so that eventually one has to abandon the project altogether. This often occurs well before old age and/or senility sets in. For athletes and dancers, it can happen in the late forties, for singers when their voices are no longer strong, and for musicians when their technical skills diminish.

Such decline is not the case, however, with a second language. Barring medical problems or senility, age is not a factor in second language use and continuity. Once learned, and given opportunities to use it, a second language is a lifetime acquisition. So too, motivation that drives learning a skill whose performance can last a lifetime differentiates it from motives driving acquisition of skills that decline with increasing age.

As important as Gardner is in motivation research, other researchers have proposed differing interpretations of motivation. In all probability, more research will reveal more orientations than integrative and instrumental motivations for studying a second language (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993). Clement and Kruidenier (1983) already proposed that, in addition to integrative and instrumental factors, the nature of the language community and the language itself are significant motivating factors for studying a second language.

One theory to gain recognition in the linguistic community holds that instead of integrative and instrumental orientations, motivation can be described as *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*. *Intrinsic* motivation results in a feeling of competence and self-determination whereas *extrinsic* motivation relies on rewards (Deci, 1975). Since an intrinsically motivated learner resembles an integratively motivated one, I will concentrate on that kind of learner. I suggest that intrinsically oriented motivation also is particular to language and differs from other kinds of motivation in the performance skill area.

With intrinsic motivation, the sense is that the learner is on an adventure by herself, with the landmarks of self-realized success marking the way. The act of discovery is in itself a reward and propels the learner on to further competence and mastery.

Compared to integrating herself totally into a new linguistic community, the learner is seen as on a self-guided mission. She is encouraged to continue her second language skill by self-gratifying accomplishments along the way. Unlike Gardner and Lambert's explanation that motivation is integratively driven by a desire to identify and integrate into the new language community, the *intrinsic* view positions the learner as a self-contained learning unit that functions well within the community but never identifies completely with it. The learner is like one ball in a room full of similar balls -- inconspicuous from the rest, yet always separate, independent and never fully integrated.

We mentioned that performance skills require some sort of public gauge to measure success. With the intrinsically motivated learner, however, there does not seem to be a need for outside approval; all the gratification and measurers of success come from the learner herself, making second language motivation in this area distinct from other performance skills.

To conclude then, second language motivation (when *integratively* oriented) contrasts with motivation of other performance skills in that it derives from the desire to

- psychologically adopt the characteristics of another group
- duplicate an existing skill
- be indistinguishable and indiscernible
- down play competition
- be always "on call"
- learn a skill of lifetime use
- perform an "unconscious act"

- and when *intrinsically* oriented, not to be dependent on an outside gauge of success

There is no doubt that analyzing differences in motivation between second language acquisition and other performance skills can have far-reaching implication for second language acquisition studies and pedagogy. Further studies on motivation can be a crucial factor in developing effective curricula in the classroom where highly motivated students can increase their skills and motivate others (Rubin, 1975).

Measuring motivation, however, has been notoriously difficult, with Gardner himself noting that considerable attention is still needed to verify the validity of measurement strategy (Gardner, LaLonde, Moorcroft, 1984). Although Gardner is preeminent in the field of second language motivation studies, his measurement strategies have come under considerable scrutiny by Oller (1981).

Given this controversy, the introduction of new data regarding second language motivation based on how it differs from other performance skills would be extremely helpful to future researchers. I suggest that the ideas presented in this paper might provide worthwhile insight into that process.

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