

# Language Teaching Materials and Learner Motivation

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**Abstract**— The motivation of the learner is one of the most important factors in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), meanwhile language teaching materials are having a very important effect and role in language learning and teaching activities. This research focus on how different materials motivate students. Many factors which affect student's motivation towards teaching materials were perceived, such as interest in the subject matter, level of difficulty, relevance to existing knowledge, perception of usefulness.

**Index Terms**—language learning, teaching material, motivation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Success in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) depends on a variety of factors such as the amount of exposure to the natural target language practice, the duration and intensity of the language course, and last but not least, the characteristics of the language learner. Motivation—one element of the learner characteristics is one of the most important factors in the field. Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) contended that motivation is the key learner variable and nothing much happens without it. It determines the degree of effort learners put into foreign or second language learning. The more motivation they may have, the more effort they tend to put into learning the language. Therefore, teachers' biggest concern is always whether students are well motivated and willing to learn what they teach. Then when I observed the class I paid attention to factors which influence students' motivation.

In my observation, I noticed some teaching materials did attract students' interests in language learning. For example, a learner preferred the listening text which was relevant to her background and an up-to-date article from newspaper enhanced students' enthusiasm. Then I recalled, in my teaching experience, I used to design some supporting materials which make the lesson more appealing, more practical in order to enhance students' enthusiasm. For example, in listening class I chose a pop song for completion exercise. In reading class I added some pictures which are relevant to the content of the articles. According to Wachob (2006), teaching materials undergird the construct of motivation. Seven and Engin (2007) also stressed, language teaching materials are having a very important effect and role in language learning and teaching activities. It showed that motivation can come from teaching materials. Therefore, since no research can cover the rather extensive motivational variables I decided to focus on how different materials motivate students. I believe the result of the research will benefit my future work since I could be clear about how to select or develop appropriate materials for my class.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The last four decades have witnessed a considerable amount of research that investigates the nature and role of motivation in SLA process. Gardner & Lambert (1972) pioneered on motivation, proposing an integrative-instrumental duality, which became widely accepted and confirmed by a number of studies. Their ten-year-long research program, in which they found that success in language attainment was dependent on learners' affective reactions toward the target linguistic-cultural group, gave validity to the study of motivation in SLA.

Some studies have attempted to extend Gardner's construct by adding new components, such as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, intellectual curiosity, attribution about past successes/failures, need for achievement, self-confidence, and other situation-specific variables such as classroom events and tasks, classroom climate and group cohesion, course content and teaching materials, teacher feedback, and grades and rewards.

In the 1980s the learning situation itself received more attention and three sets of motivational components were identified by Dörnyei (1994): i) course-specific motivational components; ii) teacher-specific motivational components; iii) group-specific motivational components. The course specific motivational components relate to the class syllabus, the materials used, the teaching method, and the learning task. Dörnyei uses the conditions presented by Keller (1983) and later by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) to describe these conditions: Interest, Relevance, Expectancy, and Satisfaction.

The first category, interest, is related to intrinsic motivation and is centred on the individual's inherent curiosity and desire to know more about him or herself and his or her environment. The second, relevance is a prerequisite for "sustained motivation and requires the learner to perceive that important personal needs are being met by the learning situation" (Keller, 1983: 406). It refers to the extent to which the student feels that the instruction is connected to

important personal needs, values, or goals. At a macrolevel, this component coincides with instrumentality; at the level of the learning situation, it refers to the extent to which the classroom instruction and course content are seen to be conducive to achieving the goal, that is, to mastering the L2.

Expectancy refers to the perceived likelihood of success and is related to the learner's self-confidence and self-efficacy at a general level; at the level of the learning situation, it concerns perceived material difficulty, the amount of effort required, the amount of available assistance and guidance, the teacher's presentation of the material, and familiarity with the task type. Satisfaction concerns the outcome of an activity, referring to the combination of extrinsic rewards such as enjoyment and pride. There is that determinant of motivation which is perhaps the most traditional: reward, punishment or outcomes. Activities for which the motivating forces are outcomes have been referred to as extrinsically motivated, as opposed to those which are intrinsically motivated (Deci, 1975).

This framework appears to be particularly useful in describing course-specific motives. Thus my research will be based on Dornyei's motivation construct to explore through what ways do teaching materials affect students' enthusiasm of language learning.

### III. GENERAL INFORMATION

The class I observed is a Business English class, which aims to help students develop specific skills in using accurate English around a business context. Among eighteen students from various countries, I mainly focused on two learners, a Chinese girl and a Japanese girl. I chose the Chinese girl because observing a Chinese student will have advantages for my future work since I will go back to China to continue my teaching career after completing this course. I chose the Japanese girl because her goal of learning language was totally different from that of Chinese girl. The Chinese girl was doing pre-master in business currently. Business English course was just an optional module for this semester. Her short-term perspective was passing this module. By comparison, the Japanese girl majored in home economics for her undergraduate and intended to take translation course in the future. She would like to take any chance to improve her language ability.

I observed the class for four times and I wrote four journals after each time to record what I had noticed in the class. Besides observation I designed a questionnaire to let learners express their opinion on the teaching materials they had worked with in the class. According to Robson's (1993), whatever form questionnaires take, they should be clear and unambiguous, and easy to answer. The questionnaire consisted of a list of five items in opposition, which are: interesting/boring, relevant to my knowledge/irrelevant to my knowledge, easy to me/difficult for me, useful for me/useless for me and satisfying/unsatisfying. Items were graded on a five-point semantic differential scale. Learners put an "X" against the place on the scale that best described their opinion of the materials. Using this technique researchers can avoid writing statements since respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they "agree" or "disagree" with it by marking one of the responses (Dornyei, 2007: 105). Finally, I interviewed the Chinese girl and the Japanese girl based on their behavior I observed in the class and the result of their questionnaire.

### IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *Teaching Material 1*

It is reading material, an article from recent newspaper, which is about McDonald's franchisee renewing licence. The article was accompanied by a picture, which displayed a successful McDonald's franchisee and his son were laughing and talking about expansion. In the class I noticed the Chinese girl looked at the picture first and talked to her friend by pointing the picture of the article (for further details see visit 4). In the interview, the Chinese girl said: "If there is a picture I will look at it first and then read the article" and the Japanese girl said: "I like this picture since it looks funny". As Seven and Engin (2007) concluded in their research, the more the teacher uses visual and audio materials during the course, the better students concentrate on the lesson. In my observation, the picture, one of visual materials did attract students' interest and attention.

What's more, in the class I also noticed that the Chinese girl paid attention to this article and read it carefully. According to her answers in questionnaire, she was somewhat satisfied with it. In the interview, she told me: "I like this article because it is from up-to-date newspaper and related to the hot topic, financial crisis". In fact, this is a kind of authentic material. Authentic texts have been defined as "...real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes" (Wallace 1992). They are therefore written for native speakers and contain "real" language. They are "...materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community." (Peacock, 1997), in contrast to non-authentic texts that are especially designed for language learning purposes. One of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to "expose" the learner to as much real language as possible and to giving the learner the proof that the language is real and not only studied in the classroom. Guariento & Morley (2001) stated that extracting real information from a real text in a new/different language can be extremely motivating, therefore increasing students' motivation for learning by exposing them to 'real' language. In addition, authentic materials also give the reader the opportunity to gain real information and know what is going on in the world around them. Authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people (Nuttall, 1996). Thus, nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic (Widdowson, 1990).

However, when reading this article the Japanese girl used e-dictionary many times to check vocabulary. She said: "There are many words I do not know and the content of the article is strange to me since I do not major in Business". As a result, she felt this material was somewhat satisfying. It shows the difficulty of teaching materials decreases motivation. Nuttall (1996) gives three main criteria when choosing texts to be used in the classroom suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Suitability of content means the reading material should interest the students as well as be relevant to their needs. Exploitability refers to how the text can be used to develop the students' competence as readers. A text that can not be exploited for teaching purposes has no use in the classroom. Just because it is in English does not mean that it can be useful. Readability is used to describe the combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text, as well as referring to the amount of new vocabulary and any new grammatical forms present. According to my research, readability, the level of difficulty, can be considered to be the most important of the three. It is not surprising that people are more willing to participate in a task if it does not require too much effort.

#### *B. Teaching Material 2*

It is group work. Each group was required to develop a competitive new product to challenge an established brand name and present it in the class. The work includes identifying the name and three special characteristics of the new product, producing consumer profile and promoting details and designing a simple slogan. In the class, the Chinese girl did not complete this task due to other incooperative members. The Japanese girl said two sentences about the slogan of the target product (for further details see visit 3). In the interview, both of them admitted this task was new and interesting. But the Japanese girl said she was not confident since she lacked marketing knowledge. She just read something which were prepared and given by her partners. Therefore, she felt this material was slightly unsatisfying. Kawai (2000) pointed out, from a constructivist perspective, content relevance of learning materials to the learner's existing knowledge is a key ingredient for intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) create the construct of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theory. Intrinsic motivation concerns behavior performed for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity. It is a state where the relevance for the learner of the content of the material is the main reason for learning. According to my research, one of the most demotivating factors for learners is when they have to learn something that they are not familiar with.

#### *C. Teaching Material 3*

It is listening material. In the recording, a Chinese business executive, talked about understanding the local cultures and building business relationship in South America and China. In the class, the Chinese girl was willing to share her knowledge of Chinese culture with classmates (for further details see visit 1). In the interview, she said this listening text was easy to understand since she was familiar with the target culture. And the Japanese girl said it was not difficult for her since this aspect of Chinese culture was similar to Japanese. Consequently, both of them rated this material satisfying. As Brozo (2005) concluded in order to foster intrinsic motivation, teacher should try to create learning activities that are relevant to students' lives. One of effective strategies is connecting the subject with your students' culture, outside interests or social lives. According to my research, learners were motivated by materials relating to their culture and their background knowledge.

#### *D. Teaching Material 4*

It is speaking material, which focus on polite expression. Two scenarios with sixteen sentences were provided by the teacher, while students were required to express the same meaning in a polite way. In the class, the Chinese girl was not interested in this exercise (for further details see visit 4). In the interview, she said she was fed up with this kind of exercise since she had a lot of similar training when she worked at Asian airline as a stewardess. On the contrary, the Japanese girl she liked this material most among four materials since she think it is not difficult for her and it is useful in everyday life. As Crookes and Schmidt (1991) pointed out a program which appears to meet the students' own expressed needs ... will be more motivating, more efficient, and thus more successful. Cunningsworth (1984) also stressed that the materials should meet students' needs: "Students particularly more sophisticated adults need to feel that the materials from which they are learning have to be connected with the real world and at the same time they must be related positively to the aspects of their inner make up such as age, level of education, social attitudes, the intellectual ability and level of emotional maturity." According to my research, students will be motivated to learn when they regard the material they are taught as worth learning.

### V. CONCLUSION

In my research I tested and tried to understand the importance and effects of teaching materials in language learning. I perceived many factors affect student's motivation towards teaching materials: interest in the subject matter, level of difficulty, relevance to existing knowledge, perception of usefulness. These findings are consistent with motivation construct identified by Dornyei (1994). Reviewed above, the level of difficulty will be a good determinant of selective learner attention. What's more, personal relevance makes an enormous difference in students' attitudes toward learning. Finally, visual material and authentic material will arouse students' interest and enthusiasm.

## APPENDIX STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess the value of the following teaching materials which were used in class this semester. There are no right or wrong answers; we want your own ideas and impressions.

Please mark ONE "X" on each scale to show how you rate the following concepts.

**Teaching Material 1**

interesting \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ boring  
 easy to me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ difficult for me  
 relevant to my knowledge \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ irrelevant to my knowledge  
 useful for me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ useless for me  
 satisfying \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ unsatisfying

**Teaching Material 2**

interesting \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ boring  
 easy to me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ difficult for me  
 relevant to my knowledge \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ irrelevant to my knowledge  
 useful for me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ useless for me  
 satisfying \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ unsatisfying

**Teaching Material 3**

interesting \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ boring  
 easy to me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ difficult for me  
 relevant to my knowledge \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ irrelevant to my knowledge  
 useful for me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ useless for me  
 satisfying \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ unsatisfying

**Teaching Material 4**

interesting \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ boring  
 easy to me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ difficult for me  
 relevant to my knowledge \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ irrelevant to my knowledge  
 useful for me \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ useless for me  
 satisfying \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ unsatisfying

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

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