

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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CHANGES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION OF HIGHER-FORM STUDENTS



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I. Preface

As a result of globalizational processes it is inevitable to get into contact and communicate with people of different languages and cultures. The new situation requires foreign language communication skills instead of just knowledge of the foreign language. That is why language learning is becoming a more and more significant issue in schools and in research, as well. These changes resulted in the need to increase our understanding of successful language learning. But how should we teach and learn effectively? Several studies shed light on the importance of motivation, as one of the most important factors that determine school achievement. The same is true for foreign language learning. However, motivation to learn a foreign language (L2) has its special characteristics, some earlier findings of school motivation are also relevant in this field. That is why I focus on two well-established pedagogical psychological concepts like learning motivation and self-concept, which show a close relationship to L2 learning motivation.

II. The goals of thesis and presentation of theme

Theories of motivation to learn a foreign language focus on various aspects of human motivation. It is due to the fact that second or foreign language learning is a learnable school subject, so studies on general learning and achievement motivation are of a direct relevance. On the other hand, it is highly affected by social and cultural influences, so in the acquisition of a second language, the student is faced with the task of not simply learning new information (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation etc.) which is part of his *own* culture but rather of *acquiring* symbolic elements of a *different* ethnolinguistic community. This involves imposing elements of another culture into one's own lifespace.

The most influential L2 motivation theory has been proposed by a Canadian researcher, Robert GARDNER. He emphasizes the social psychological aspects of motivation as he claims that the learner's attitudes towards the L2 and L2 community strongly influence motivation. The coexistence of different linguistic (English and French) communities drew his attention to the importance of *integrative* motivation that refers to a motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language. He also defined *instrumental* orientation that refers to learning for practical reasons such as getting a better job, higher salary or passing the language exam. In the early phase of research

instrumental motivation was thought to be in opposition with integrative motivation, as the utilitarian counterpart of it, but later it turned out to be in connection with some attitudinal factors, which means that it may also influence L2 learning motivation positively.

In the early 1990s a number of researchers called for an educational shift in motivation research, to expand theory into everyday classroom practice. One of the most influential articles declared that we should seek to encourage a program of research that will develop from, and be congruent with the concept of motivation that teachers are convinced is critical for SL success. This idea gave a new stimulus to motivation research and a number of theories suitable for classroom application and empirical research related to classroom environment has been proposed.

Following this line a classroom investigation shed light on the significance of three main motives that play an important role in a school context, without any direct contact to the L2 speaker community. Results show that *integrative motivation*, linguistic *self-confidence* and *appraisal of the classroom environment* are the most influential motivational factors, which also confirms the relevance of further psychological and pedagogical research. DÖRNYEI Zoltán broadened the focus of this study and developed a more general framework of L2 motivation, giving a list of motivational components categorized into three main dimensions. He identified three dimensions of motivational components, the *Language Level*, the *Learner Level* and the *Learning Situation Level*. This study, being a pedagogical psychological one, focuses mainly on the learners' attributes, the Learner Level.

DÖRNYEI draws our attention to another important feature of motivation: instability and variability in time. It means that motivation is changing during the language learning process, so if we want to study the motivational background of students, we should take time factors into consideration.

On the basis of the above mentioned models the main purpose of this study is:

- to investigate the Learner Level of language learning motivation (learning orientation, intelligence, self-concept, locus of control),
- to follow the changes of motivation through a longer period,
- to reveal the relationship between learning and foreign language learning motivation.

My study aims to examine what constituents foreign language learning is composed of and how these components are in connection with learning motivation, and other characteristic features of students, like learning orientation, intelligence, self-concept, locus of

control and school achievement. In addition I try to find an answer for the relations of gender and motivation, with a special focus on the changes during the time period under investigation.

III. Research and methods

When making decisions about research methods I was led by two main principles: I was looking for methods which are able to measure motivational and other learner characteristics in groups of 10-14 year-old students, and are reliable in statistical terms. Following these principles I obtained data regarding learning motivation and learning orientation from Kozéki-Entwistle's Learning Motivation and Learning Orientation Questionnaire, I measured foreign language learning motivation with the questionnaire introduced by Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994), and I used Raven Progressive Matrices, Tennessee Self-concept Scale and Rotter's questionnaire of locus of control to reveal further student characteristics. School achievement was valued on the basis of school grades. For statistical analysis of results I used SPSS 13.0 program and applied Pearson's and Spearman's correlation, one-sample, independent-samples and paired-samples T-test, variance analysis and Repeated Measures test.

Deciding on participants of research I had to take three main points into consideration:

- I wanted to study the changes of motivation through a longer period, so I needed students, who started language learning not too long time before.
- I had to find students of that age, who understand and are able to fill motivation questionnaires.
- In my research I planned to follow changes of motivation, so I needed students who continue their studies in the same school where they started.

According to these principles I chose the age group of 10-14 year-old, higher form-students, who started language learning an year before the first occasion of data collection, they were old enough to fill out questionnaires that measure student characteristics I was interested in, and most of them were supposed not to change school in the following years, so I could carry out data collection without losing participants. Finally participants of research were 374 students of five primary schools in Debrecen (Hatvani István Általános Iskola, Békéssy Béla (later Bolyai János) Általános Iskola), Mátészalka (Móricz Zsigmond Általános Iskola) Szerencs (Bolyai János Tehetségfejlesztő és Informatikai Általános Iskola) and

Törökszentmiklós (Bethlen Gábor Református Tagozatos Általános Iskola). The same tests were administered in 2003, 2004 and 2005, in the 5th, 6th and 8th form, so I have the possibility to compare the results and draw conclusions about the development tendencies.

IV. Presentation of research results

My hypotheses are based on the literature review and can be arranged into six main groups. The first and largest group (1) contains expectations considering the general features and development tendencies of motivation. The second group of hypotheses (2) refers to the relationship between motivation and special learners' features like learning orientation, intelligence, self-concept and locus of control. The next group (3) contains predictions about school achievement and final grades of foreign languages, so we can find links between students' characteristic features and school achievement. Gender differences (4) were also expected, that help us to find the background factors of different school success of boys and girls. The last two hypotheses are in connection with special subgroups of students: the fifth one (5) lists expectations referring to differences between schools and classes, and the sixth one (6) makes predictions about subgroups that were made on the basis of foreign language school grades and studied languages.

1. According to previous assumptions learning motivation scores gradually decrease from 5th to 8th form, while Feeling Under Pressure show an increasing tendency. Changes in adolescence and in attitudes towards learning, changes of interpersonal relationship and social interaction, higher expectations, approaching high-school studies and inadequate teaching methods may be related background variables of these ensuing motivational changes. The leading motivational dimension is Performance motive, so meeting the requirements, taking responsibility and completing tasks are the most important factors of motivation. Predictions of changes in foreign language learning motivation were also supported by the results, because a significant decreasing tendency can be seen in nearly all subscales. A thorough analysis of subscales show that Travel orientation, Language use anxiety and Attitude toward language learning remain more or less the same during the three years of research.
2. Results show that dimensions of learning orientation also show decreasing tendencies, while Instrumental orientation is growing. The scores of self-concept fall in value, too, and they are closely associated with motivation scores. The same is true for the locus

of control. According to the results, intelligence is not connected closely to learning and language learning motivation.

3. School achievement and final grades of foreign languages grew worse during the period of investigation. They are mostly determined by motivational factors, intelligence and some aspects of self-concept.
4. The study of gender differences unambiguously points out the better school achievement and stronger motivational basis of girls.
5. Differences between schools and classes are generally easy to explain, knowing the special characteristic features of them, however, the ambivalent result (good grades – low motivation) of one of the schools needs further interpretation.
6. Predictions concerning subgroups of students mostly proved to be true, however, the difference between the motivational scores of learners of English and German was not as clear-cut as it was expected on the basis of literature review.

The results of our study allowed us to form numerous practical conclusions and suggestions about classroom motivational strategies. The question of practical usefulness may arise: Then how should we motivate students to learn foreign languages? On the basis of these research results I would list some motivating techniques, most of them are in accordance with DÖRNYEI's recommendations:

- We should strengthen students' self-concept and self-esteem through positive reinforcement, individualized and sometimes easier exercises to provide motivation and feeling of success.
- Decrease feeling of being under pressure, self-criticism and classroom anxiety by helpful, accepting behaviour and encouragement.
- Set up tasks and projects in which students can work independently according to their own choices and interest, provide regular feedback of progress and take time to celebrate any success to ensure feeling of satisfaction and to strengthen performance motives.
- Build affective motives and attachment through good student-teacher relationship by congruency, empathic understanding and positive regard.
- Boys need a greatly challenging and motivating classroom environment because of their lower motivation and higher feeling of being under pressure.
- Pay attention to girls with low self-esteem, who do not feel confident because of their physical and personal problems.

- Highlight the importance and usefulness of speaking foreign languages by showing its values in the globalized world to form positive attitudes toward language learning.
- Develop group-cohesion by the use of small-group tasks and activities where students can share personal information and get to know each other better.
- Promote knowledge and travel orientation by reminding students that mastering an L2 can be an instrument to accomplish these goals.
- Take into account the motivational and personality changes and demands arising from adolescence.

Future research should focus on the investigation of other ability and personality factors, with a special attention to qualitative data collection techniques. In addition, a more sophisticated statistical analysis of data should explore underlying models and the directions of relations.

This study may be used as a step to establish a motivation-sensitive language teaching practice in creating a positive motivational climate to enhance school achievement and foreign language proficiency as an ultimate purpose.

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