

Invigorate and Motivate

© Paul A Hodge (2004)

This article is targeted to a specific group of readers who have interests in:

- Thinking about becoming a ESL/EFL teacher for an institution
- A student who is learning a foreign language (FL) or second language (L2)
- The ESL profession in general.

The article begins by asking the reader to consider the following three character profiles. They are all hypothetical, yet believable, constructs of interview summaries of three students.

All the students attend the same school and have the same teacher for their foreign language which is English. All three are high achievers at school and have above average scores in academic subjects like maths, science and history.

PERSON A (female)

Learning English is important to me because it can help me understand the different culture and lifestyles of another country. For example I can listen to music and read literature belonging to another country. The end result is that I hope to become a more knowledgeable person and gain higher qualifications overseas. The world is one large global market and the English language is very popular in business and employment.

I have also made a new friend, whom I like very much, and she speaks English. She has invited me to meet, and hopefully become friends, with other English speaking associates.

In addition, my parents work for a company based in America and they encourage me to speak English at home.

PERSON B (male)

I have no interest in travelling or studying abroad. I prefer my own culture and I have developed strong values and beliefs based on my family of origin and culture. Learning another language will only complicate matters and besides my career prospects are here in my own country.

All my close friends can't speak English. I find the English class boring and I should be spending more time studying subjects that really count towards my career. Nevertheless, I do what is required of me to pass my English exams. I can't afford to have my overall average grade scores slump because of one subject. There is also some peer competition between students.

PERSON C (male)

Learning English is expected of me to enter my local university. My parents have invested a lot of money in my education and English is a compulsory subject. I study hard at school to get high scores in all my subjects including English. Eventually I hope to enter university in my own country and maybe further my education overseas. However, once outside the classroom I only speak my native language and I have no close friends or family members who can speak good English.

The author now invites the reader to consider the following three questions:

(a) In the long term, which student do you think will have the highest standard of oral English and be able to converse with native English speakers from around the world?

(b) In the short term who will have a high degree of competency in reading and writing English but have poor spoken English?

(c) Who will not succeed in achieving (a) or (b)?

What were some of the keywords that came to mind as you contemplated your answer? Was it one or more of the following words?

lazy keen motivated narrow-mindedness ethnocentric
personality traits

You may say “none of the above” but to come to that conclusion your mind had to perform a host of mental functions to filter all the information and to comprehend the questions. Your proficiency is dependent on one of the concepts contributing to learning a new language. This conception forms a major part of cognitive psychology and is called *information processing* – the study of the structure and function of mental processes such as *encoding, decoding, memory, retrieval* and *critical thinking*. Equally important is that you were only able to express your thoughts linguistically in your native language. Some readers may have sensed some emotion or affect as they read the testimonies. All-the-same, it is reasonable to assume that your linguistic mental processes played the main role in bringing to your conscious awareness one or more of the above English words. What is even more amazing is that you were unaware that this complicated process of linguistically encoding and decoding of information was taking place in your subconscious.

Congratulations! You have reached the pinnacle of comprehending the English language and yet you still are astounded at how simple it was. But wait...What if you were asked to choose one or more words from the following list:

形容词 锐利的 及物动词 极端保守的 种族[民族]中心主义的

What! No way can I process this new information!

Be assured that the translation is only for the first five words as shown above. I did the translation from English to Chinese using WorldLingo software launched from Microsoft Word.

So now you have some idea what's involved in comprehending a foreign language. Wait there's more...

What if you were asked to say the words in Chinese? How to speak Chinese is not found in a textbook or English-Chinese dictionary. Speaking the language can be achieved by having someone who is competent in reading and speaking Chinese to demonstrate the peculiarity of Chinese linguists. Even then you may still have problems.

Let's go one step further. Let's say that you eventually manage to say the words in Chinese but what if you were asked to *remember* them in a few days time?

Are you gaining a greater appreciation of what's involved in learning a foreign language?

The author's intention of making the above diversion was to have the reader interact more with what they are about to read further on in this article. I would invite the reader to walk in the shoes of the three students and try to *imagine* (another powerful function and wonder of the human mind) what you would do to increase the chances of becoming proficient in speaking a foreign language. In addition the reader is requested to call to mind – use the power of your *memory* – to recount the steps you had to take to acquire your native language and more importantly what was the 'well-spring' or source that gave energy and impetus to your willingness and motivation to learn your native language? Were you motivated to gain *intrinsic* rewards like love, happiness, and gratification? Did you use language to *integrate* or to be accepted into a community? Was language vital in building and discovering your self-identity? Think about the affect of having another person speak your name. Or was language just an *instrument* that motivated you for *extrinsic* rewards like money, status, power and control? Or maybe you were not motivated at all and you 'magically' became a native speaker through a process of *conditioning* and repetition, or by *observational learning* by watching and listening to others speaking the native language?

Pause for a moment; close your eyes and try to remember. As you do these exercises also try and be aware of your feelings, the images and the environment in which you developed your unique style of speaking your native language.

If it is not already clear to the reader, this article is directed towards motivation and how it is intermingled with human cognition. Also how emotions drive us to act and how we adapt our behaviour to changes to alter the consequences or outcomes. In other words learning a language

involves the 'whole' person, their environment and not just intelligence and knowledge.

Take a minute to revise the student testimonies and the original three questions at the beginning of the article.

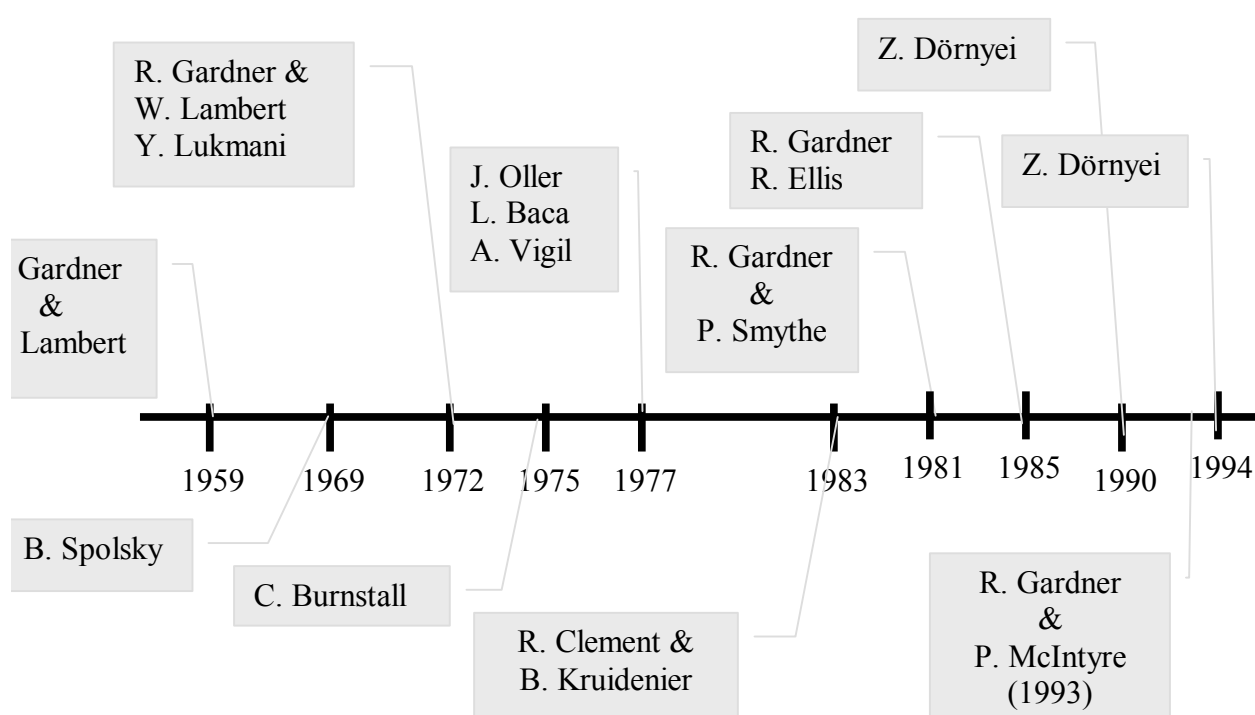
Need more information? Or have you made up your mind?

Below is a research timeline outlining a sample of researchers who have invested time and energy into studying how motivation may or may not be a contributing factor in learning a second language. It is not the intentions of the author to 'reinvent the wheel' or to tell readers 'how to suck eggs'. *What did he just say, suck eggs!*

No need to be disturbed or feel insulted. You have just been exposed to another aspect to learning a new language called *idioms* - the way of using a particular language that comes naturally to its native speakers and involves both knowledge of its grammar and familiarity with its usage (Encarta Dictionary).

In other words the author is making an assumption that the reader is someone who has background knowledge of SLA or who is currently studying SLA. Therefore, the research timeline and names of researchers is an invitation to further explore SLA on another occasion. The author's intention is not to overly tax reader with data and statistics and has a reference list at the end of this article for recommended reading by those who are *motivated* to build their knowledge base in the field of SLA.

Motivation in SLA Research Timeline



Note: This timeline was developed by the author and relates to the reference list at the end of this article. **Researcher's summary**

Gardner & Lambert (1959; 1972)	Presented evidence that motivation was a dynamic factor in L2 learning and its application in everyday life. It was argued that those learners who were <i>integratively</i> motivated were more successful than those with <i>instrumental</i> motivation.
Spolsky (1969)	In addition to the above it was indicated that attitudinal aspects of L2 acquisition influenced the success of learning a second language.
Lukmani (1972)	In contrast to Gardner, Lukmani found that students studying English in India were mainly instrumentally motivated to learn and their proficiency scores correlated significantly with instrumental motivation scores.
Burnstall (1975)	Suggests that learner who experiences moments of success in the process of language acquisition can affect motivation.
Oller, Baca & Vigil (1977)	Similar findings to Lukmani showing that students in India who were instrumentally motivated scored highest on the language proficiency even though their participants did not want to integrate with the culture of the target language.
Clement & Kruidenier (1983)	Opened the way to possible occurrence of other types of orientation towards learning such as 'general travel', 'general friendship', 'general knowledge', and 'curricular language importance'. They also investigated the contextual factors of ethnicity.
Gardner & Smythe (1981)	The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to assess motivation in L2 learners based on their goals, desire to learn, the intensity with which they learned, and their attitudes towards learning the target language.
Gardner (1985)	Acknowledges that there is a linear relationship between attitudes and motivation and that attitude plays a supporting role as far as the learner's overall motivation is concerned.
Ellis (1985)	Examined a learner's set of beliefs about the target language culture, their own culture, and in the case of classroom learning how the student related to the teacher and the tasks they were asked to perform.
Dörnyei (1990)	Investigated how the student's need for achievement and their past language learning experiences may influence language proficiency.
Gardner & McIntyre (1993)	Posit that there is a difference between ' <i>motivational considerations</i> ' as opposed to ' <i>situational considerations</i> '. The learner's environment can be extremely important where the actual learning takes place. An example would be the classroom setting.
Dörnyei (1994)	Put forward an 'eclectic, multifaceted construct' of SLA. Comprising of three levels: (1) language level (2) learner level and (3) learning situation level. (see next page)

ECLECTIC CONSTRUCT

Components of Foreign Language Learning in the Classroom (Dörnyei 1994)

Note: This diagram was construed by the author and is only a guide to understanding the main points of the researcher's concepts.

LEARNING SITUATION LEVEL

Course-specific motivational components

- Consistent interest & arousal
- Relevance to learner's goals
- Learner's expectancy & control
- Satisfaction (intrinsic-extrinsic)

Teacher-specific motivational components

- Class management
- Affiliative drive
- Teacher's persuasion
- Socialisation

Group-specific motivational components

- Group goal-orientation
- Rewards and regulations
- Group cohesion
- Classroom goal structures

LEARNER LEVEL *Personality traits reflecting the affective and cognitive characteristics of the learner*

Need for achievement

A personality trait that is present in every aspect of the learner's life

Self confidence

Language use anxiety Self-efficacy
 Attributions about past experiences
 Perceived L 2 competence

LANGUAGE LEVEL *The learner's reason for choosing a given language*

Instrumental

Extrinsic motives internalised by the learner that relate to future career expectations.

Integrative

Learner's affective predisposition regarding the culture and people associated with the target language.

So far this article may appear to some readers as jigsaw puzzle and may even have similar traits to the enigma surrounding SLA. The picture puzzle we are trying to assemble here is of three language students and to find out who will be the one to reach the highest proficiency in learning a foreign language.

In the beginning the author invited the reader to make a judgement. An assessment based on one's 'gut feeling' or intuition. Then the article presented a battery of research to help the reader make an informed verdict.

It should now be obvious to the reader that the student testimonies were loaded or biased and tailored to the research findings. After all they were only hypothetical characters. However, it is fair to say that each student's narrative can be considered true given the diversity of student backgrounds and motives for learning a second language.

So, which student do you think will have the best chance of reaching a high score in English proficiency? Was your first guess right?

There is a high probability that readers choose student A and understandably so given the research evidence.

In conclusion...well the author will leave that part up to you the reader.

However, if you are a student reading this article then you are now challenged to review your goals and motivation for learning a foreign language.

If you are an ESL teacher you may well ask yourself how you can improve the learning environment for your students and to display a positive and constructive empathy towards invigorate their motivation to succeed.