

Foreign Language Learners' Motivation at CSU

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Abstract

Earlier research showed that motivation, one of the individual differences, affects second language acquisition. Due to diminishing student enrollment in foreign languages at CSU, the present study compares motivation of three different language learning groups at CSU and analyzes which factors affect their motivation. The research results show that participants are highly motivated to learn foreign languages regardless of the language they are taking. Also, it is shown that there is no significant difference depending on independent variables such as if the course is required or optional for the student, if the student is considering minoring the language, and if the student has spent time in a country where the language is spoken.

Keywords: motivation, AMBT, foreign language

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As it has been discussed in length, cognitive differences are not the only deciding factors of individual differences in Second Language Acquisition. Of the conative differences studied one of the most intriguing is motivation, i.e., “the desire to initiate L2 learning and the effort employed to sustain it” (Ortega, 2009, p. 189). According to Busse and Walter (2013) modern foreign languages face severe challenges in English-speaking countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom (UK) (as cited in Coleman, 2005). One of the most significant challenges appears to come from the increasing dominance of English as a world language, which makes it hard for educational institutions to persuade students to study languages other than English (as cited in Do ˝nyei & Csize ˝r, 2002).

Colorado State University, unlike many other universities in the United States, does not list foreign languages as required for undergraduate students. Second languages are only required for a limited amount of areas of study. Additionally, student enrollment in foreign language courses is diminishing, as is the amount of students who choose to major or minor in this field of study. Therefore, it is necessary to probe current foreign language students' level of motivation to see if it corroborates the diminishing enrollment numbers. The traditional approach to analyze motivation in second language acquisition has been to employ the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner, 1985). The AMTB has been heavily criticized for not being up to date with current psychological research and appears, according to these researchers, to fall directly in line with the synchronic tendencies inherent to the properties model of second language acquisition. However, it was noted that there was the correlations of .29 to .39 between motivation measured by the AMTB and achievement in a second language according to a meta-analysis of 75 studies (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Therefore, the current study uses a sampling

of questions from the AMTB to analyze motivation levels of students enrolled in three different foreign language classes: Intermediate Russian, Beginner Spanish, and Beginner Arabic.

Upon analysis, it appears that across the three languages and two class levels (beginner and intermediate) all of the students are comparably highly motivated to learn their chosen L2. Whereas their motivation is not significantly influenced by experience in countries where the language is spoken, amount of time dedicated to classroom study, or whether or not the course is required for their major, motivation does appear to be slightly affected if they believe the L2 will positively affect future employment opportunities. The questions that received the highest results reflected student enjoyment in class and the ability to converse with target language speakers. One of the factors that was not taken into consideration in this study is the students' level of success in their specific L2 courses. It would be interesting to contrast the answers given on the probe with such data. It seems that in certain cases the high motivation results would potentially not reflect success in acquisition and/or the class. Additionally, it would be interesting to question the students' reaction to their instructors' teaching styles as well as to the accelerated L2 curriculum implemented at Colorado State University.

Instrument Development

The AMTB (Gardner, 2004) for use with secondary school students studying English as a foreign language was modified for the present study. The AMTB is composed of 104 items and 20 items were chosen for the study. The same number of positive and negative questions, 10 respectively, was used to enhance the reliability of the test. However, after implementing the questionnaire survey, one positive question was found to contain an error and it was discarded. As a result, 19 variables were assessed. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) in the case of positive questions. The Likert scale was

inverted to 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree) in the case of negative questions so that the scores would accurately reflect the students' level of motivation.

The AMTB is composed of three scales to measure characteristics of motivation: motivation intensity, desire to learn the target language, and attitudes toward learning the target language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Subcategories in the adapted AMTB and sample items from each category are as follows:

1. Motivation intensity toward Spanish, Arabic, Russian (9 items). Sample: *Studying this foreign language is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.*
2. Desire to learn Spanish, Arabic, Russian (3 items). Sample: *I have a strong desire to know all aspects of this foreign language.*
3. Attitudes toward learning Spanish, Arabic, Russian (7 items). Sample: *Studying foreign language is not enjoyable.*

Method

Subjects and Relevant Demographic Information

Students who are registered in LARA 105(Arabic), LSPA 107(Spanish), and LRUS 304 (Russian), for Fall 2013 at CSU were asked to participate in the study. The LARA 105 and LSPA 107 courses are for Beginners and the LRUS 304 is for Intermediates. All the participants use English as their L1 and there were two bilinguals, German and Spanish, respectively. Thirty-six students (six for Russian, twenty for Spanish and ten for Arabic) were answered the questionnaires about motivation and five probes from each three group were randomly chosen and used for the study.

The students ranged in age from 18 to 25, with an average age of 21. Women composed 33% of the participants. 40% of the sample is taking the foreign language as a required course. 80% of the sample is considering the foreign language as their minor. 47% of the sample has been to countries where the corresponding foreign language is spoken. The length of years of the foreign language study ranged from three months to eight years, with an average length of 30 months.

Table 1 provides more specific demographic data about participants.

Table 1

Demographic Information about Participants

Language Class and Level	LARA 105(Arabic)	LSPA 107(Spanish)	LRUS 304 (Russian)		
	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)		
Age	Less than 20		20-21	More than 21	
	3 (20%)		7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)	
Gender	Male		Female		
	10 (66.7%)		5 (33.3%)		
Period of Studying This Language (month)	0-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	Over 25
	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)
Required or Optional	Required		Optional		
	6 (40%)		9 (60%)		
Considering This Language as Your Minor	Yes		No		
	12 (80%)		3 (20%)		
Experience in Countries Where the Language is Spoken	Yes		No		
	7 (46.7%)		8 (53.3%)		

Administration

One team member acquired the permission of foreign language instructors to come into their classroom and administer the probe during the final fifteen minutes of the Arabic Beginner

and Russian Intermediate classes. This team member also administered the probe in her own Spanish Beginner class. All probes were administered in English. The classes are all fifty-minute sessions held from 10am to 10:50am or 12pm to 12:50pm five days a week. The probe participants successfully completed the probe within the time allotted.

Results

In order to understand the overall motivation score for participants in the Arabic, Spanish and Russian foreign language classes, Measures of central tendency were computed to summarize the data for the score variable. Measures of dispersion were computed to understand the variability of scores for the score variable. The following are the results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Motivation Score Mean and Standard Deviation for Arabic, Spanish and Russian Classes

	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Arabic	5	3.53	.31
Spanish	5	3.19	.24
Russian	5	3.33	.24
Total	15	3.35	.26

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the participants' motivation score among three different foreign language classes, Arabic, Spanish and Russian. The results are shown in Table 3. According to the results, there was no significant difference in motivation scores between the three classes.

Table 3

One-Way Analysis of Variance of Motivation Score in Foreign Language Classes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	2	.29	.14	1.99	.18
Within groups	12	.86	.07		
Total	14	1.15			

Three independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare motivation scores 1) between participants who took the foreign language class as optional or required 2) between participants who were considering taking this foreign language as their minor and who were not 3) between who have been to countries that speak this foreign language and who have not. The results are shown in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6, respectively. No significant differences were shown for all of the comparisons.

Table 4

Independent t-Test for Motivation Scores between students who are required to take the course and those who are not

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Optional	9	3.37	.32	-.34	13
Required	6	3.32	.24		
Total	15	3.35	.56		

Table 5

Independent t-Test for Motivation Score between those considering minoring in the language and those who are not

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Consider a Minor	12	3.36	.30	.31	13
Not Considering a Minor	3	3.30	.27		
Total	15	3.33	.29		

Table 6

Independent t-Test for Motivation Scores between students who have spent time in a country where the language is spoken and those who have not

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Have Spent time in Countries	7	3.40	.33	.54	13
Have Not Spent Time to Countries	8	3.31	.26		
Total	15	3.37	.30		

Discussion

There is no significant difference in average score among three different groups. Overall, they are highly motivated to learn foreign languages regardless of the language they are taking.

One of the possible reasons is that their major may have an influence on their motivation; the future career based on their major probably needs an ability to use a foreign language.

Also, it is found that there is no significant differences depending on independent variables such as if the course is required or optional, if the student is considering minoring the language, and if the student has experiences in a country where the language is spoken. In other words, it is shown that most of the participants are highly motivated to learn a foreign language. Their motivation was not influenced by independent variables at all.

References

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Appendix A

Age: ____

Gender: M F

What class is this? _____

What is your major? _____

How many years have you studied this foreign language? _____

Is this course required or optional? _____

Do you or are you considering having this foreign language as your minor? _____

Have you ever been to countries where this foreign language is spoken? _____

Following are a number of statements with which some people agree and others disagree. Please circle one alternative below each statement according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement with the item. The following example will serve to illustrate the basic procedure.

- a. American football is much better than American baseball.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

1. I have a strong desire to know all aspects of this foreign language.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Knowing this foreign language isn't really an important goal in my life.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Studying this foreign language is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. It would bother me if I had to speak this foreign language on the telephone.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I keep up to date with this foreign language by working on it almost every day.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. I really have no interest in foreign languages.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. I enjoy meeting people who speak foreign languages.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. Studying this foreign language is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the culture that is associated with this language.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. I think this foreign language is dull.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. Studying this foreign language is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than this foreign language.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. Studying this foreign language is important because I will need it for my career.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. I would rather spend time in my foreign language class and less time in other classes.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
15. I think my foreign language class is boring.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my foreign language class.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. I can't be bothered trying to understand the more complex aspects of this foreign language.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

18. I put off my homework for my foreign language class as much as possible.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. I really enjoy learning this foreign language.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Thank you!

Appendix B

	Language class	age	gen.	L1	major	period of studying this language (month)	required or optional	considering this language as your minor	experience in countries where the language is spoken
1	Arabic	19	F	English	Ethnic Studies	12	optional	Y	Y
2	Arabic	22	F	German & English	Business	3	optional	Y	Y
3	Arabic	19	F	English	Communication in studies	3	required	N	N
4	Arabic	20	M	English	International studies	12	optional	Y	N
5	Arabic	22	M	Spanish & English	Ethnic Studies	12	optional	Y	N
6	Spanish	21	F	English	Music	42	required	N	N
7	Spanish	18	M	English	Civil Engineering	60	optional	Y	N
8	Spanish	20	M	English	Undecided	96	required	Y	N
9	Spanish	20	M	English	Political Science	60	optional	Y	Y
10	Spanish	20	F	English	Human Development Family Studies	12	optional	Y	Y
11	Russian	21	M	English	International studies	24	required	Y	Y
12	Russian	24	M	English	Biochemistry	24	optional	Y	Y
13	Russian	20	M	English	International studies	24	required	Y	N
14	Russian	24	M	English	International studies	36	required	Y	N
15	Russian	25	M	English	Political Science	36	optional	N	Y