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1 Background knowledge

Language teachers frequently use the term 'motivation' when they describe successful or unsuccessful learners. This reflects our intuitive – and in my view correct – belief that during the lengthy and often tedious process of mastering a foreign/second language (L2), the learner's enthusiasm, commitment and persistence are key determinants of success or failure. Indeed, in the vast majority of cases learners with sufficient motivation can achieve a working knowledge of an L2, regardless of their language aptitude or other cognitive characteristics. Without sufficient motivation, however, even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language.

> ***How true . . .***
>
> 'The more teaching I observe (well over 500 lessons, by dozens of different teachers, over the last ten years, I recently calculated) the more strongly convinced I become that Motivation is What Matters – *if they gottit, ya laffin', if they don't, fergit it!*'
> (From an e-mail message from Christopher Ryan, a teacher trainer friend)

In this chapter I would like to introduce the scene of motivation research both in educational psychology and in the L2 field. I will describe how various scholars have understood the notion of motivation in the past, what the contemporary trends are and how the theoretical knowledge can be turned into practical techniques to motivate language learners in the classroom. Last but not least, I will present a *taxonomy* of motivational strategies that will form the basis of the rest of the book.

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Further reading

This book is intended to raise practical issues and make concrete suggestions for classroom practice rather than offer a comprehensive account of motivation theory. If you would like to know more about the theoretical background of the field, please refer to a recent summary, *Teaching and Researching Motivation* (Dörnyei 2001), which offers a comprehensive overview of the main issues and challenges in contemporary thinking about motivation. It also contains a detailed section on how to do research on motivation, providing guidelines for those who would like to conduct their own investigations. In addition, there is an up-to-date collection of 20 research studies that I have co-edited with Richard Schmidt from the University of Hawaii, *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition* (Dörnyei and Schmidt 2001), which contains contributions from international scholars from a wide range of motivational topics.

Within the field of educational psychology, I have found two books particularly useful: Jere Brophy's (1998) *Motivating Students to Learn* and Paul Pintrich and Dale Schunk's (1996) *Motivation in Education*. Concise and up-to-date summaries are also provided in the *Handbook of Child Psychology* (Damon and Eisenberg 1998) and the *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (Berliner and Calfee 1996).

1.1 Different approaches to understanding motivation

As discussed briefly in the Introduction, the term 'motivation' is a convenient way of talking about a concept which is generally seen as a very important human characteristic but which is also immensely complex. By using the term we can answer the question, *'Why does Rupert make such wonderful progress?'* by simply saying, *'Because he is motivated'*, without the need to go into details about what factors have contributed to this overall commitment. And just as conveniently, if Rupert is reluctant to do something, we can easily explain this by stating that *'He isn't motivated'* rather than having to elaborate on all the forces that have contributed to his negative attitude. In other words, 'motivation' is a general way of referring to the *antecedents* (i.e. the causes and origins) of action. The main question in motivational psychology is, therefore, what these antecedents are.

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Because human behaviour has two basic dimensions – *direction* and *magnitude* (intensity) – motivation by definition concerns both of these. It is responsible for:

- the *choice* of a particular action;
- the *effort* expended on it and the *persistence* with it.

Therefore, motivation explains *why* people decide to do something, *how hard* they are going to pursue it and *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity.

All motivation theories in the past have been formed to answer these three questions but, quite frankly, none of them have succeeded fully. This is not very surprising, though: human behaviour is very complex, influenced by a great number of factors ranging from basic physical needs (such as hunger) through well-being needs (such as financial security) to higher level values and beliefs (such as the desire for freedom or one's faith in God). Can we blame motivational psychologists for not yet coming up with a comprehensive theory to explain the interrelationship of all these diverse motives?

Well said . . .

'Motivation, like the concept of gravity, is easier to describe (in terms of its outward, observable effects) than it is to define. Of course, this has not stopped people from trying it.'
(Martin Covington 1998:1)

You can probably imagine that when such a broad and important question as 'What causes behaviour?' is addressed, there is bound to be disagreement amongst scholars. Indeed, different schools of psychology offer very different explanations for why humans behave and think as they do, and there have been historical changes in our understanding of motivation, with different periods attaching importance to different aspects. In the first half of the twentieth century, the dominant views (such as Sigmund Freud's) conceptualised motivation as being determined by basic human *instincts* and *drives*, many of them being unconscious or repressed. Although such unconscious motives do not feature strongly in current motivational thinking, it seems clear that they play a significant role in our lives and therefore they are likely to be 'rediscovered' before long.

The middle of the twentieth century was dominated by *conditioning theories* related to behaviourist psychology, with a great deal of research

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focusing on how stimuli and responses interplay in forming *habits*. Although many of the findings were based on experiments with animals – such as Pavlov's dog or Skinner's rats – rather than humans, much of the acquired knowledge is still relevant for the understanding of issues like the role of practice and drilling, positive and negative reinforcement, or punishment and praise in learning.

The 1960s brought about further important changes. Partly as a counterreaction to the mechanistic views of behaviourism, humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow proposed that the central motivating force in people's lives (unlike in rats' or dogs') is the *self-actualising tendency*, that is the desire to achieve personal growth and to develop fully the capacities and talents we have inherited. In his famous 'Hierarchy of Needs', Maslow (1970) distinguished between five basic classes of needs, which he defined as:

- *physiological needs* (e.g. hunger, thirst, sexual frustration);
- *safety needs* (need for security, order and protection from pain and fear);
- *love needs* (need for love, affection and social acceptance);
- *esteem needs* (need to gain competence, approval and recognition);
- *self-actualisation needs* (need to realise one's potential and capabilities, and gain understanding and insight).

These needs form a *hierarchy*, with the lower, physiologically based needs having to be satisfied first, before we can strive for the deeper happiness and fulfilment that comes from satisfying our higher-level needs.

The current spirit in motivational psychology (and in psychology in general) is characterised by yet another theoretical orientation, the *cognitive approach*, which places the focus on how the individual's conscious attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and interpretation of events influence their behaviour; that is, how mental processes are transformed into action. In this view, the individual is a purposeful, goal-directed actor, who is in a constant mental balancing act to coordinate a range of personal desires and goals in the light of his/her perceived possibilities, that is his/her perceived competence and environmental support. In other words, whether people decide to do something is determined first by their beliefs about the values of the action, and then about their evaluation of whether they are up to the challenge and whether the support they are likely to get from the people and institutes around them is sufficient. It's all supposed to be very rational . . .

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An overview of contemporary approaches in psychology

> ***Quite so!***
>
> 'With a hypothetical construct as broad and complex as motivation, there is always room for controversy and argumentation.' (Raymond Wlodkowski 1986:12)

Within the overall cognitive view of motivation that characterises the field today, we find a surprising number of alternative or competing sub-theories. In order to understand the reasons for this diversity we need to realise that the variety of motives that can potentially influence human behaviour is staggering. Let us think for a moment of a range of different reasons that, for example, could get a young woman, Jackie, who is sitting on a bench in a park on a lovely afternoon, to stand up and start running:

- She enjoys jogging.
- She has made a resolution that she will do some jogging every afternoon to improve her health.
- She would desperately like to lose some weight.
- Rupert appears jogging along the path and she wants to join him.
- Her athletics coach has just told her to get up and keep running.
- She is acting in a well-paid TV commercial advertising running shoes and the break is over.
- A black dog appears unexpectedly and starts chasing her.
- It has just started to rain.
- She realises that she has to fetch something from home quickly.

Obviously, the list is far from complete but it illustrates well that motivation is indeed an umbrella-term involving a wide range of different factors. This is why motivational psychologists have spent a great deal of effort in the past trying to *reduce* the multitude of potential determinants of human behaviour by identifying a relatively small number of key variables that would explain a significant proportion of the variance in people's action. In other words, the challenge has been to identify a few central motives that are simply more important than the others. Broadly speaking, different scholars have come up with different 'most-important' motives, and this is what differentiates between the various competing theories. Table 1 provides a summary of the currently dominating motivational approaches.

Looking at Table 1, it must be admitted that each position in itself is

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Table 1 *Summary of the most well-known contemporary motivation theories in psychology*

	GOOD SUMMARIES	MAIN MOTIVATIONAL COMPONENTS	MAIN MOTIVATIONAL TENETS AND PRINCIPLES
Expectancy-value theories	Brophy (1999), Eccles and Wigfield (1995)	Expectancy of success; the value attached to success on task	Motivation to perform various tasks is the product of two key factors the individual's *expectancy of success* in a given task and the *value* the individual attaches to success on that task. The greater the perceived likelihood of success and the greater the incentive value of the goal, the higher the degree of the individual's positive motivation (see also pp. 57–58).
Achievement motivation theory	Atkinson and Raynor (1974)	Expectancy of success; incentive values; need for achievement; fear of failure	Achievement motivation is determined by conflicting approach and avoidance tendencies. The positive influences are the *expectancy* (or perceived probability) of success, the incentive *value* of successful task fulfilment and *need for achievement*. The negative influences involve *fear of failure*, the incentive to *avoid* failure and the *probability* of failure.
Self-efficacy theory	Bandura (1997)	Perceived self-efficacy	*Self-efficacy* refers to people's judgement of their capabilities to carry out certain specific tasks, and, accordingly, their sense of efficacy will determine their choice of the activities attempted, the amount of effort exerted and the persistence displayed (see also pp. 86–87).
Attribution theory	Weiner (1992)	Attributions about past successes and failures	The individual's explanations (or 'causal attributions') of why past successes and failures have occurred have consequences on the person's motivation to initiate future action. In school contexts ability and effort have been identified as the most dominant perceived causes, and it is has been shown that past failure that is ascribed by the learner to low ability hinders future achievement behaviour more than failure that is ascribed to insufficient effort (see also pp. 118–122).

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Self-worth theory	Covington (1998)	Perceived self-worth	People are highly motivated to behave in ways that enhance their sense of *personal value and worth*. When these perceptions are threatened, they struggle desperately to protect them, which results in a number of unique patterns of face-saving behaviours in school settings. (see also p. 88).
Goal setting theory	Locke and Latham (1990)	Goal properties: specificity, difficulty and commitment	Human action is caused by purpose, and for action to take place, *goals* have to be set and pursued by choice. Goals that are both specific and difficult (within reason) lead to the highest performance provided the individual shows goal commitment. (see also pp. 81–85).
Goal orientation theory	Ames (1992)	Mastery goals and performance goals	*Mastery goals* (focusing on learning the content) are superior to *performance goals* (focusing on demonstrating ability and getting good grades) in that they are associated with a preference for challenging work, an intrinsic interest in learning activities, and positive attitudes towards learning.
Self-determination theory	Deci and Ryan (1985), Vallerand (1997)	Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation	*Intrinsic motivation* concerns behaviour 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. *Extrinsic motivation* involves performing a behaviour as a means to an end, that is, to receive some extrinsic reward (e.g. good grades) or to avoid punishment. Human motives can be placed on a continuum between self-determined (intrinsic) and controlled (extrinsic) forms of motivation.
Social motivation theory	Weiner (1994), Wentzel (1999)	Environmental influences	A great deal of human motivation stems from the sociocultural context rather than from the individual.
Theory of planned behaviour	Ajzen (1988), Eagly and Chaiken (1993)	Attitudes; subjective norms; perceived behavioural control	*Attitudes* exert a directive influence on behaviour, because someone's attitude towards a target influences the overall pattern of the person's responses to the target. Their impact is modified by the person's *subjective norms* (perceived social pressures) and *perceived behavioural control* (perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour).

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very convincing: indeed, few people would find fault with the argument that people will only be motivated to do something if they expect success and they value the outcome (expectancy-value theories), or that it is the goal that gives meaning, direction and purpose to a particular action (goal theories). Neither would we question the fact that people are generally motivated to behave in ways that puts them in a better light (self-worth theory) or that if we lack confidence about being able to carry out a certain task, we are likely to avoid it (self-efficacy theory). It is also reasonable to assume that our past actions, and particularly the way we interpret our past successes and failures, determine our current and future behaviour (attribution theory), and that we will be more motivated to do something out of our own will than something that we are forced to do (self-determination theory). Finally, no one can deny that our personal likes and dislikes – i.e. attitudes – also play an important role in deciding what we will do and what we won't (theory of planned behaviour). In sum, all the different theories make a lot of sense; the only problem with them is that they largely ignore each other and very often do not even try to achieve a synthesis. This leaves us with a rather fragmented overall picture.

Well said . . .

'As a concept, motivation is a bit of a beast. A powerfully influential and wide-ranging area of study in psychology, motivation at its core deals with *why people behave as they do*. But in terms of mutual understanding and tightly controlled boundaries of application, motivation roams the field of psychology with almost reckless abandon. There are over twenty internationally recognised theories of motivation with many opposing points of view, differing experimental approaches, and continuing disagreement over proper terminology and problems of definition. . . . In the fields of instruction and learning this has led to some difficult problems – whom to believe, which theories to apply, and how to make sense out of this wealth of confusing possibilities. In general, instructors and trainers can find very few guidelines that suggest how to cohesively and consistently apply the most useful and practical elements from this extensive array of motivational information.'
(Raymond Wlodkowski 1986:44–45)

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What kind of motivation theory do we need for practical purposes?

'Pure' theories of motivation, that is, models that represent a single theoretical perspective and are therefore anchored around a few selected motivational factors, while largely ignoring research that follows different lines, do not lend themselves to effective classroom application. Classrooms are rather intricate microcosms where students spend a great deal of their life. Besides being the venue where students acquire skills and learn about the world, classrooms are also where they make friends, fall in love, rebel against the previous generation, find out who they are and what the purpose of life is . . . in short, where they grow up. So much is going on in a classroom at the same time that no single motivational principle can possibly capture this complexity (cf. Stipek, 1996; Weiner, 1984). Therefore, in order to understand why students behave as they do, we need a detailed and most likely eclectic construct that represents multiple perspectives. Although some key motives do stand out in terms of their general impact on learning behaviours, there are many more motivational influences that are also fundamental in the sense that their absence can cancel or significantly weaken any other factors whereas their active presence can boost student achievement.

Well said . . .

'The real problem with motivation, of course, is that everyone is looking for a single and simple answer. Teachers search for that one pedagogy that, when exercised, will make all students want to do their homework, come in for after-school help, and score well on their tests and report cards. Unfortunately, and realistically, motivating students yesterday, today, and tomorrow will never be a singular or simplistic process.'
(David Scheidecker and William Freeman 1999:117)

An overview of approaches in the second language field

Traditionally, motivation research in the L2 field has shown different priorities from those characterising the mainstream psychological approaches. This has been largely due to the specific target of our field: *language*. It does not need much justification that language is more than merely a communication code whose grammar rules and vocabulary can be taught very much the same way as any other school subject. In a

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seminal paper written in 1979, the most influential L2 motivation researcher to date, Robert Gardner, argued forcefully that a second/foreign language in the school situation is not merely an 'educational phenomenon' or 'curriculum topic' but also a representative of the cultural heritage of the speakers of that language (Gardner, 1979). Therefore, teaching a language can be seen as imposing elements of another culture into the students' own 'lifespace'. In order to learn an L2, say French, students need to develop a French identity: they need to learn to think French and – though only partially and temporarily – also become a bit French.

True!

'Learning a foreign language always entails learning a second culture to some degree, even if you never actually set foot in the foreign country where the language is spoken. Language and culture are bound up with each other and interrelated. . . . People don't exist in a vacuum any more than club members exist without a club. They're part of some framework: a family, a community, a country, a set of traditions, a storehouse of knowledge, or a way of looking at the universe. In short, every person is part of a *culture*. And everyone uses a language to express that culture, to operate within that tradition, and to categorise the universe. So if you're planning to carry on some sort of communication with people who speak or write a given language, you need to understand the culture out of which the language emerges.'
(Douglas Brown, 1989:65)

The truth of the assumption that language and culture are inextricably bound together is clearly evidenced in situations where students for some reason do not like the L2 community and therefore refuse to incorporate elements of their culture into their own behavioural repertoire. For example, in Hungary, where I grew up, every school child was exposed to several years of learning Russian, the language of Hungary's communist Big Brother, with hardly any effect. As far as I am concerned, after studying Russian for over a decade, I cannot even recall its alphabet, which was normal at that time (and which I regret today).

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