

Interaction, Motivation & The ESL Chat Room

ESL チャットルームにおける相互作用と 動機づけの関係

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(Abstract)

This paper will examine the importance of interaction in the development of language learning from using motivational strategies in a lunchtime chat program. Using Long's interaction hypothesis (Long, 1981) as a base a chat program has been initiated that attempts to simulate being in a L2 (second language) country environment to encourage further study and interest in English. Dörnyei's (2001) motivation strategies and his Motivational Teaching Practice Model are essential techniques for motivating and encouraging students studying at Japanese University. This paper consists of two sections: the first examines current theories of motivation and the second describes and analyses the development of interaction in the lunchtime chat program.

(要約)

本稿は、学習意欲を高めるためのランチタイム・チャットプログラムに関して言語学習の向上には相互作用が重要であることを論ずる。Long (1981) の相互作用に関しての仮説を基に、チャットプログラムでは英語力の向上および英語にさらに興味を持たせるため、学習対象言語の国にいる環境を想定することを試みている。また本稿では、Dörnyei (2001) のストラテジーおよび練習モデルが、日本の大学で学習者に学習意欲を高めるための本質的な技法であることを述べている。本稿は2つのセクションから成り立っており、最初のセクションでは学習意欲を高めるストラテジーについて従来の説を述べ、第2セクションではランチタイム・チャットプログラムの発展について分析している。

Key Words : interaction, motivation, conversation, chat, intrinsic, extrinsic

キーワード：相互作用、動機、会話、チャット、内発的、外発的

1. Introduction

Attending the customary required university class is not enough to become proficient in English. Working outside the classroom is the difference between those who will be able to use English in their job and in the global community, and those that can not. In order to provide students with an opportunity to practice and build fluency, a lunchtime chat session at Kobe Gakuin University, Arise campus, has been initiated. This voluntary lunchtime chat session is attempting to provide students a relaxed place to have lunch and practice using English language. Thus, trying to put the focus on the learner who is presented with an opportunity to take part in meaningful communicative interaction in order to respond to genuine communicative needs (Pica, & Garcia Mayo, 2000). It may not convey an academic perspective, but encourages fluency and confidence in communication and experience in cross culture exchange. The essence of any language proficiency is being able to communicate, as such, perfect grammar is not necessary. Recognizing that being “less than perfect” is the only way to gain confidence and is in fact far more “normal” and important than correct grammar.

Long’s interaction hypothesis stated that participation in conversation with native speakers, which is made possible through the modification of interaction, is a necessary condition for second language acquisition (Long, 1981). Which stems from Hatch (1978) on the importance of conversation to improve grammar and Krashen’s (1985) ideas that comprehensible input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition. If a student is unable to comprehend text/conversation in their own language, dealing with a second language would be almost impossible. According to Mackey (1999), from the resulting interaction, learners have opportunities to understand and use the language that was previously incomprehensible (Mackey, 1999).

The past few decades have brought increased interest in students’ motivation in the fields of L2 learning and language acquisition. A number of studies have reported that motivation is one of the major determining factors in success in acquiring a second or foreign language (Gardner, 1985; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Ryan & Deci, 1997). According to the rubric of “motivation in context,” researchers posit motivation as an interactive experience between students and their environments. Environments, generally defined, include: instructors, peers, activities, the content area, the instructional discourse, as well as the standards and beliefs of the participants. Motivation is influenced by numerous and overlying contexts. Examination of the influence of educational contexts range from macro views of “culture as context” (Volet, 1999) to micro studies of dyadic interacting (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1985).

“I am Japanese so I can’t speak English.” is quite often the standard response when confronted with English. Is it from their culture that relies on putting the stress at ease coupled with the honorific of “master/slave” relationships or just the easy way out, of not

having to make an effort? Building confidence is crucial, as displayed in the third aspect of Dörnyei's Motivational Teaching Practice Model (Appendix I). Japanese students not only tend toward modesty in their assessments of improvement and confidence, but moreover seem to have the "English Complex" complicated by their inexperience with English conversation. The native teacher transcends the language barrier and must also carefully bridge the cultural barrier—including negative self-assessments and other notions that can inhibit students' learning.

Over time it has been drilled into students' minds so much that they cannot speak, they start to believe it. English and Japanese structures are totally different which makes it difficult for Japanese (Brownell, 1967). The reasons why absorbing communication skills in English is difficult for Japanese are focused on geographic factors, racial factors, and linguistic factors (Koike, 1993). Studying a language for years and not having the ability to use it would be depressing and would need encouragement to continue. Motivating students is a challenge, particularly important in Japan where students are notorious for being unmotivated to the point of apathy (McVeigh, 2001). It goes without saying that students that attend a voluntary chat session are motivated. It is a real head start to have students voluntarily show up at my office wanting to learn. And now that I have them on "the field" (metaphorically), the next task is to show them how to play. Motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement and, accordingly, the last three decades have seen a considerable amount of research that investigates the nature and role of motivation in the L2 learning process (Dörnyei, 1994). Getting over the "I can't speak English" complex is the first task. The underlying goal of the lunchtime chat is to show learners that they have the potential and ability to communicate by providing motivational strategies stemming from Dörnyei's motivational process model. In his book *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom* (2001) motivation is described as a four stage frame work: creating the basic conditions, generating initial motivation, maintain it and self evaluation (Appendix I).

2. Defining Motivation

"Motivation" is a term frequently used in both education and research fields. Different interpretations of the definition depend on various psychological perspectives of human behavior. In spite of the numerous definitions of motivation that have been proposed, "it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of this concept" (Dörnyei, 1998, p.117).

Brown, & Gonzo, (1994, p.34) give the definition of motivation as "the extent to which you make choices about (a) a goal to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to the pursuit." Keller (1983) believes that ability and motivation are the major factors of variation in educational success. "Ability refers to what a person can do; motivation, to what a

person will do” (Schmidt, 1996). Similarly, Johnson & Johnson (1979, p.283) offered the definition of motivation as the “tendency to expend effort to achieve goals.”

Relating motivation to L2 learning, Gardner (1985) proposed, “Motivation is a term which is often used with respect to second language learning as a simple explanation of achievement”(p.10). Continuing, Dörnyei (1998) indicated that L2 motivation is “a multi-faceted construct, and describing its nature and its core features requires particular care” (p.118). Gardner’s (1985) definition of motivation in language learning is the “effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language” (1985, p.10). Gardner defined the motivation to learn an L2 as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experiences in this activity” (1985, p.10). Similarly, Dörnyei (1998) conceptualized language-learning motivation as including three components: motivational intensity, desire to learn the language and an attitude towards the act of learning the language.

2-1. Theorizing Motivation

Before suggesting techniques for motivating students, this section will review theories and causes of students being motivated or unmotivated. There are literally dozens of theories of motivation in psychology. For example, behaviorism emphasizes the role of drive and reinforcement, and defines motivation as “the anticipation of reinforcement” (Brown & Gonzo, 1994, p.35). Cognitive psychology stresses motivation as a function of an individual’s thoughts rather than of some instinct.

As Dörnyei & Kormos (2000) maintain, “motivation theories in general attempt to explain three interrelated aspects of human behavior: the choice of a particular action, persistence with it, and effort expended on it. That is, motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it” (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000, p.521).

The basic schema for mapping motivation is based on the work of Maslow’s (1970) pyramid of human needs, which progresses from the satisfaction of purely physical needs up through safety and communal needs, finally to “self actualization,” a state of reaching one’s fullest potential. After Maslow (1970), Gardner & Lambert (1972) have further examined motivations for language learning using a socio-psychological framework, to yield the “socio-educational model”.

More recent researchers have challenged these theories’ comprehensiveness by searching for other motives in foreign language learning. Dörnyei (1994) argues that the socio-educational model overlooks specific cognitive aspects of the motivation to learn. Indeed, contemporary research studies indicate that new cognitive variables such as need for achievement (Dörnyei, 1998), attributions (Schmidt, 1996), self confidence (Clement et

al., 1994), self-efficacy, and goal setting (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995) influence foreign language learning. These researchers also claim that in various settings based on the formal classroom, motivation towards foreign language learning seems to depend on divergent contexts, and to involve sub-components of Gardner's traditional integrative /instrumental orientations, as well as intrinsic orientation (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983; Dörnyei, 1990; Clement et al., 1994).

One of the dominant frameworks for contemporary psychological models is Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, which posits intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Their theory is that intrinsic motivation is involved in doing something that is inherently interesting or pleasurable, and extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separate outcome. Self-determination is regarded as a prerequisite for any behavior to be intrinsically rewarding.

Traditionally, motivation has been regarded as a variable, momentary state that is aroused temporarily by environmental factors; or else a stable trait that is attributable to the individual person (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). The former state, focusing on situational characteristics that are externally controlled, such as rewards, has usually been termed extrinsic motivation, while the latter state, focusing on the individual and performance of an activity for its own sake or personal pleasure, has been termed intrinsic motivation.

2-2. Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation can include an attraction with the subject, a connection to it within one's lifestyle or in learning history. Beginning the language history early is the first step in building confidence and later reinforcing acquisition. The recent inclusion of English classes in Japanese Elementary school system will play an important role in future motivation of students. Intrinsic motivation gives a satisfaction of completion when grasping it and a sense of accomplishment.

Dörnyei's research has indicated kinds of teaching strategies that educators can employ to develop and maintain their students' intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei (2001) also makes the cogent point that 'the best motivational intervention is simply to improve the quality of our teaching' (p. 26). He shows in particular the need for 'instructional clarity' and refers to Wlodkowski's (1986) checklist for achieving this. Included are such obvious points as: 'explain things simply' and 'teach at a pace that is not too fast and not too slow.' Teachers also need to accept that, rather than dwell on student's lack of motivation, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students are motivated and stay motivated. Using the students' L1 occasionally to demonstrate a point or explain directions motivates them by showing that the teacher also has an interest and can speak their language. Because little extrinsic motivators are supplied most students attending the chat are intrinsically motivated and those who are not can be influenced and strengthened by attending.

2-3. Extrinsic Motivation

Money, grades and expectations are typical extrinsic motivation and not all activities are sufficiently original, challenging or aesthetic to be intrinsically motivating (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation involves “reasons that are instrumental to some consequence apart from inherent interest in the activity” (Noels, 2001, p.46), in other words, external rewards. The external rewards can be prizes, money, praise, good grades or even punishment avoidance (Brown, 1994). The rewards can also be deferred for an EFL student, such as getting a better job, becoming able to emigrate, for example.

Sansome & Harackiewicz (2000) note that human motivation does not follow from purely intrinsic or purely extrinsic dynamics, but rather from combinations, including constructs of contextual factors. Although many researchers continue to negatively regard rewards, and view learning as superior and more desirable when it results from what is considered an intrinsic motivation, Hidi (2000) and Harackiewicz et al. (2000) claim, conversely, that over the past two decades such negative evaluations of extrinsic motivations may have hindered the use of external intervention that could have created more equitable situations in the classroom for students who rarely value school learning and academic accomplishment.

3. A room with a view Lunchtime Chat

“If you build it they will come.” (Field of Dreams, movie title, 1989)

It is a good feeling to know students feel comfortable coming to your office for support and to practice their English. Students have gravitated to me wanting to practice speaking with a native speaker, as should be the case of English learners. To accommodate them and make it easier for others to come, in 2011 the Lunchtime Chat was started and is slowly gaining momentum. Sessions are held on Monday and Wednesday from 12 to 1pm in my office. The average number of students has been steady at five with the most being eight at one time. Only a few times have students been turned away, because of not enough space. Wednesday has not been as successful with an average of about two students. This is partly due to schedule conflicts so sessions could not be held consistently every week. The total amount of students attending per semester is on average twenty. Some would attend almost every week and some would continue from the first to the second semester. Others would come once a month or less, which gives a good mixture of learners. Most students would bring their food or a drink and consume their lunch during the chat time. In the office is a microwave and hot water for their convenience and on occasion would be offered tea or treats. Students that attend vary in age and ability. There are first year students who want to improve their English, and older students that have gone abroad and want to maintain their English ability. The lower level students tend to come in pairs or small groups while students with confidence

tend to come alone. Most are from the Humanities, with some from the Psychology and Economics department. The ratio of males and females is about equal. Typically shy and coy and even more so when put in a group of strangers, yet students seem to warm up and relax, eating lunch after a few sessions. At Kobe Gakuin there are not many places where students can go and practice English, therefore being immersed in an English only setting can be confusing and difficult, which makes it a struggle to prevent the conversation from drifting into Japanese. To avoid this, intervention into the conversation is often necessary by interjecting a comment or asking a question to get the conversation back into the L2. Seating is on a sofa, a few sofa chairs and a bunch of folding chairs, around a low coffee table with paper, pens and space for eating lunch. This provides students with a cozy, comfortable environment and a circular work area for a maximum of eight people and importantly giving everyone the same eye level. (Appendix II). In the beginning there was the problem that some did not feel comfortable conversing with other Japanese in English. “Why should I speak English to other Japanese” or “Our language is not English, that is for foreigners.” have been some of the comments from students. This is owing to the lack of confidence in their ability and also the feeling that the other students pronunciation and proficiency is not sufficient enough to communicate. The misconception is soon realized once they relax and see that cooperation and working together is easily acquired. One way to do this is to make students empathetic to other learners, by showing, for example that Japanese learners also have problems with Kanji or polite forms of their language. This will help them recognize their own limits and give them a better perspective of learning. Overcoming their mental barrier is a major accomplishment in becoming engaged and eventually a confident communicator.

The main activity is chatting, participating but letting them try and lead their own conversations; I would drift in and out of the sitting circle. In preparation for the session, they are instructed to prepare a topic, story or explain what they did on the weekend. When this activity slows down, more directed activities like games are used, to generate energy and excitement: Uno, Pictionary, Chinese Whispers, and Outburst. The competition and excitement of winning drew attention away from language and more on the task at hand. Motivation activities were indirectly given to show that English is within their reach and to show the usefulness of English in their future. Examples include “A to Infinity” or activities that show the instrumental value of English. In A to Infinity students are given a topic and each person says one word that they can think of related to the topic and keep it going as long as possible. This could be as simple as numbers, the alphabet or colors and work up to more advanced topics. According to Knight, A to Infinity (Knight, 2002) helps students conceptualize that they have the ability to speak English, by hearing it, understanding it, thinking, and speaking English.

Another application of Dörnyei's motivational strategies is promoting instrumental values by generating initial motivation. To do this reading/discussion materials are used that show the importance of English related to their life. An example is the article; "Japanese companies planning to make English their official language" (Bunkier & Wright, 2012). A reading/discussion exercise that generates motivation and generates awareness of how English can help them get a better job or broaden their career choices. Asked to read beforehand, the article is then reviewed in class and discussed. They seemed to recognize the benefits of studying and also established a positive atmosphere in the session. Great for demonstrating a point, however structured activities should be limited to maintain the chat's relaxed atmosphere.

Another activity that was successful was using YouTube to show videos. Students are asked to find a video and present it to the class with a short speech and discussion afterwards. In preparation a monthly topic would be decided and when they are ready they would make their presentations; topics include: How to study English, My favorite song, Cultural differences and Animal training. This was not a required assignment and not everyone made presentations. However, those who did were motivated with topics that interested them and their peers, and gave the chat a focal point.

The chat session attempts to focus on the student being given the opportunity to take part in meaningful communication and interaction with peers and a native speaker. Students are involved in their own learning experience by participating with feedback, correction, repetition, negotiation and production of the L2. As Mackey (1999), notes, as linguistic units are rephrased, repeated, and reorganized to aid comprehension learners may have opportunities to notice nuances of the target language. An example of interaction termed negotiation by Long (1981) and Pica et al. (2000) is used when second language learners (SLL) do not understand what is being said so they have to negotiate in the conversation.

NS : *I like your watch.*

SLL : *....watching?*

NS : *Your watch. It's nice.*

SLL : *Oh, yes. Thank you.*

In this example taken from a chat session, the SLL does not understand the compliment and does not recognize the target word. The NS repeats and rephrases the compliment to direct comprehension. Through interaction students can direct their attention on problematic features of knowledge of production. This kind of interaction gives students opportunities to understand and use language that previously they did not have confidence using. In other words they can build on their passive knowledge and learn from their mistakes.

An experiment to enhance extrinsic motivation has been used in the chat program, the use of attendance stamp cards, (Appendix IIIa) an advertising gimmick that almost every shop in Japan uses, giving a stamp after purchases to get a reward after filling up the card. Learners are to receive a small reward for completing the card, no one has yet to finish. The initial hope was that students could use the card as evidence, and show their other teachers of their sincere effort outside of class to improve their communication skill. These results gave yet to reach a conclusion. Correspondingly with the shop stamp cards to acquire their attention even for a brief moment to subconsciously think about the session or to give an incentive to attend then the card has done its job.

4. Conclusion

It is now widely acknowledged that access to L2 input, particularly to input that comes through face-to-face interaction and the negotiation of meaning, is vital to the L2 learning process (Pica & Garcia, 2000).

This paper has examined the importance of interaction in the development of language learning from using motivational strategies in a lunchtime chat program. As the importance of English becomes more prevalent the interactive chat will be even more relevant. It should be noted that even though interaction plays an essential role, on its own it is not enough and beginners may find some difficulty without proper basic training. Students without a basic knowledge of English might feel out of place not able to participate or contribute to the chat.

For those interested in creating their own program more advertising and promoting is recommend to inform students and drum up interest. For this program pamphlets were created, (Appendix IIIb) and was mostly promoted by word of mouth. To insure better attendance, more campus wide promotion should be carried out. Space is also an issue that needs to be addressed, as a small office might not provide enough space if numbers increase or even discourage because some might feel uncomfortable in a small environment. Designating a classroom or larger office would provide more space to perform different activities.

Trying to motivate Japan's language students can be a frustrating task, and can even be in vain unless a teacher endeavors to understand the relevant, specific effects of Japan's education system and culture. Thus the interaction must be tailored to the culture since conventional understanding of "motivation" may not be applicable across cultures that are non-western.

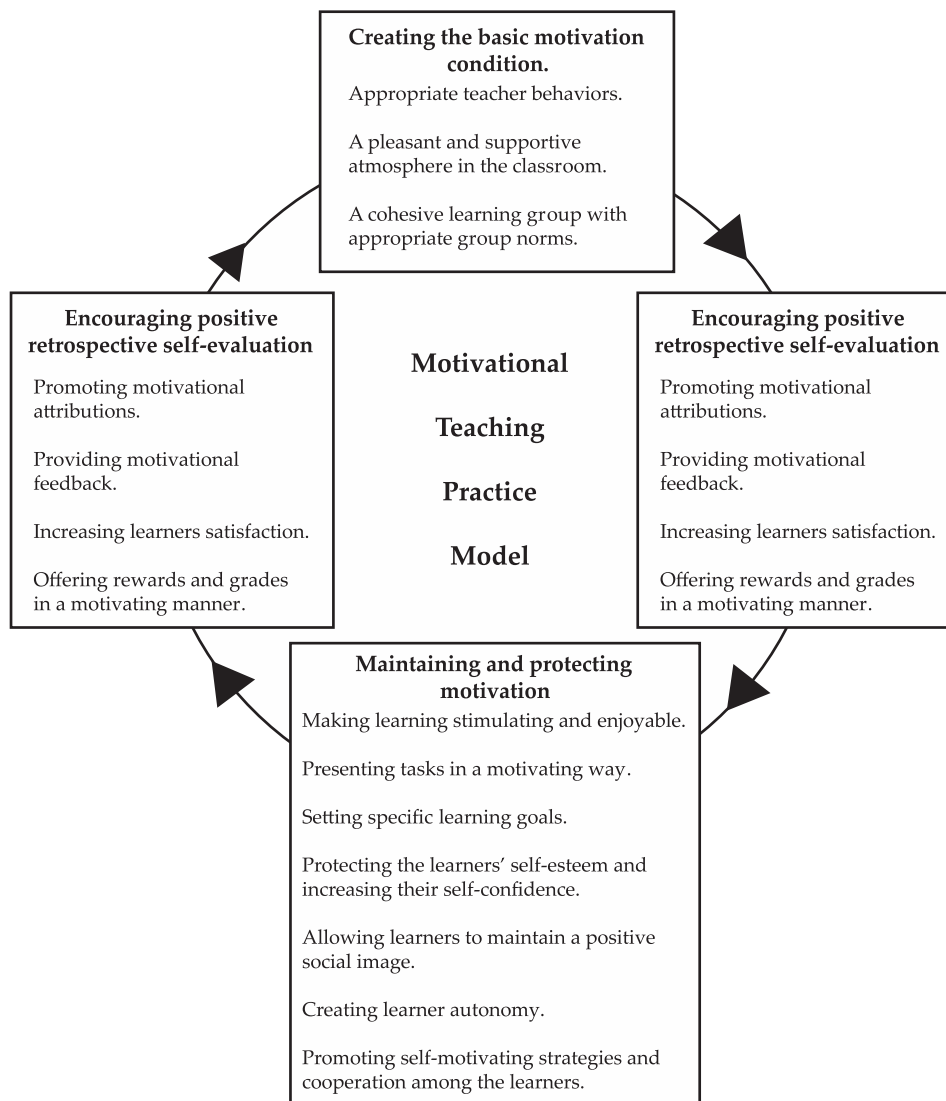
By understanding motivation and what motivates learners we can become more efficient educators. Preparing for tests and attending passive lectures will not produce proficient speakers and does not provide confidence building experience.

Swain (1995) has argued that it is having to actually produce language that forces

learners to think about syntax. The chat session provides students a rare chance on campus to absorb and practice their skills. After a semester of sessions there was a noticeable improvement in some students proficiency and fluency. Some spoke with more confidence, more openly and seemed more at ease with conversing with a native speaker. In future research the data and results of the program need to be empirically documented and how conversational interaction facilitates second language development further explored.

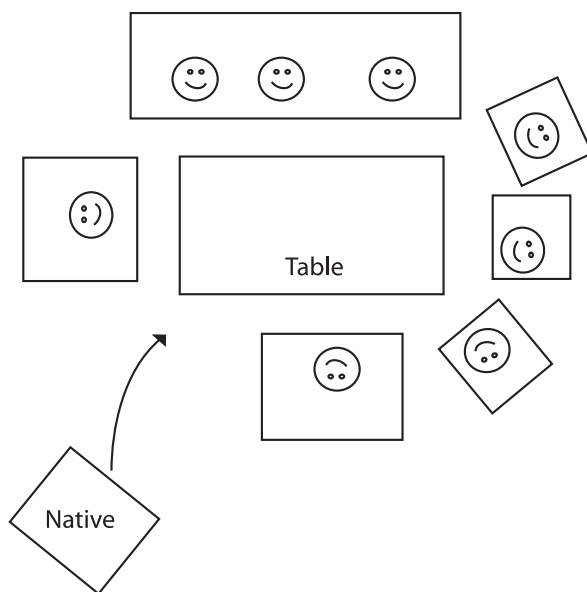
Appendix I

The Components of Motivational Teaching Practice in The L2 Classroom.



(From the *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom* by Dörnyei, 2001, p.29)

Appendix II
Seating Chart



Appendix IIIa
Afternoon Chat Attendance Card

STAMP CARD



Kobe Gakuin University

This card is to show that :

has voluntarily attended "A Room with a View" lunchtime chat.

これは"ランチタイムチャット"の出席カードです。

Appendix IIIb
Afternoon Chat Pamphlet

4/2013

Kobe Gakuin University



WHAT : English chat time
WHEN : Every Monday and Wednesday 12-1pm
WHERE : Building 3 6th Floor Greisamer's Office.
WHO : Everyone Invited
PRICE : FREE!
Eat your lunch and improve your communication skills

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