



LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL COMPETENCE¹

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Introduction

Motivation has long been considered as one of the most important – perhaps *the* most important – individual difference in language learning and use. This has often been explicitly recognized by applied linguists: for example, Pit Corder (1981: 1) wrote many years ago:

“Given *motivation*, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data.”²

Christopher Brumfit (quoted in Ciliberti 1994: 19) stated:

“The elements which define the learning/teaching process are the following:

1. exposure ... to the target language;
2. opportunity for language use ...;
3. *motivation* to respond to the previous two conditions.”

On a similar line, Jack Cummins (2005: 4) added:

“To the extent that instruction in L_x is effective in promoting proficiency in L_x, transfer of this proficiency to L_y will occur provided there is adequate exposure to L_y (either in school or environment) and adequate *motivation* to learn L_y.”

and more recently Zoltan Dörnyei (2005: 65) confirmed:

“Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement.”

So motivation has always been seen as a prerequisite for language learning to take place, so much so that we may tend to consider it as an independent variable, sometimes even a natural gift or the result of favourable conditions – something that happens to be there “by chance”, and thus a factor that is hardly within our control. Although teachers would be ready to recognize that much can be

¹ This paper is based on a talk given at TESOL Italy’s 36th National Convention “Words & Worlds” - Rome, Nov. 18-19, 2011.

² In this and the following three quotations *italics* are mine.

done (and *is* indeed done) to improve the motivational quality of learning tasks in the classroom, both internal (e.g. individual personality traits) and external (e.g. the presence of a negative socio-cultural environment) factors are considered to set considerable limits to educational efforts.

To offer both teachers (and students) more scope for action, we need to take a different look at motivation and considers aspects of this construct that, although well-documented in the literature, and frequently mentioned by both applied linguists and psychologists, have not had the impact they deserve in teaching approaches and classroom applications. In this paper I will therefore try to discuss the following basic tenets and highlight their pedagogical implications:

- motivation is a *dynamic, situated, multi-dimensional* concept, which has its roots in the individual but develops and changes in social contexts;
- motivation is largely based on students' beliefs and attitudes towards
 - languages/cultures, and the impact these have on the *identity* of individuals and groups;
 - themselves as language learners and users, and the perception of their *role* in learning, especially with regard to their *expectancy of success*;
- motivation is strictly linked with the features of *learning tasks*, with an emphasis on *self-regulation* as both a prerequisite and a result of teachers' and students' combined efforts.

In this way I hope I will be able to offer a way (or ways) to re-consider the *motivation* variable in our profession as a real *competence* which, just like any other competence, can be nurtured and developed, as the driving force in setting in motion language learning and keeping it going all along the teaching/learning process.

For once my starting point will be neither theories of motivation, nor teaching practices, but the students themselves, "voices from the classroom" that I have been collecting in a series of surveys carried out in Italian upper-secondary schools in the past few years. Readers can easily carry out similar surveys by using the materials that can be found on my website³.

Motivation: a multi-dimensional competence

In response to a very basic, general question like, "What prompts you to study at school?", students gave a variety of answers⁴:

- (1) "I can say I'm living a positive experience in this class thanks to my friends and my school results... but especially my friends ... thanks to them every morning I find the motivation to get up and come to school, where every day with them is a treat." (*Barbara, 17*)
- (2) "The wish to be happy. You can't be happy if you never do well at school, first because you become the teachers' target, and then because you get scolded at home ..." (*Enrica, 15*)
- (3) "You need to work in a good environment, have a good relationship with teachers and be supported and encouraged by your family." (*Mario, 17*)
- (4) "What prompts me to study is ... above all the fact that if I look at the world of work today I see it hard and taxing and far off from me. That's why I try to study as best as I can so that I can get good results and, who knows, a good job." (*Francesco, 17*)

³ For a detailed description of the surveys, including the materials used and the results, see www.learningpaths.org/motivazione.

⁴ Students' original words have been translated from Italian into English. The number in brackets next to the student's name refers to her/his age.

Motivation is a real *multi-dimensional* construct, basically because it develops at the intersection of its psychological dimension (individual people and their personality) and its sociocultural dimension (how individuals interact with the social contexts in which they live and work):

- first, as Barbara (1) clearly states, there is the classroom as a group, including teachers of course, the classroom dynamics and the classroom climate – all this, as Barbara says, has deep connections with personal goals and especially with socio-affective needs. Motivation develops within what has been called a “social arena”, a context where experiences (like establishing friendships, falling in love, developing values and skills) are constantly shaped by the context. It is precisely one of the school’s main aims to coordinate and integrate these *social* and *affective* needs within its *academic* and *formative* needs, for example by providing cooperative experiences and group tasks that cater for affect and social bonds;
- then, as (2) and (3) above show, there is a whole network of personal relationships, within and beyond the school: from teachers to parents, from families to local communities. Mario’s insistence on a “good environment” stresses the importance of the contexts in shaping people’s will to learn;
- finally, there are links with society at large and the labour market in particular: some of these adolescents, like Francesco (4) seem to be very much aware of what expects them – and what is expected of them – outside school, out there in the real world. Since the “world at large” now plays a crucial role alongside more traditional *formative environments* like schools, education needs to bridge the gap between formal and informal types of learning, to connect the classroom with what young people do and learn through a variety of new learning opportunities.

So when we talk about students’ motivation we cannot just focus on the individual student. Motivation, in other words, is a *situated, contextual* concept: the individual is part of several contexts, starting from the classroom and reaching out into family, community and society at large. We will soon see how the fact of *belonging to so many different contexts at the same time has deep implications for the language learner’s identity*.

(5) “Yes, I didn’t like this subject at the start, but then, by doing my homework regularly, I started to like it.” (*Gisella, 16*)

What Gisella is reminding us of here is that motivation is also, and very importantly, a *dynamic* concept, a developing force that changes over time, across the curriculum and according to the context and the learning task at hand. Personal motivation is in constant, dynamic evolution – we cannot measure it once and for all and predict how it will develop – which is the same thing as saying that people are in constant evolution and, especially with teenagers, we cannot, and indeed, should not, consider their present motivational profile as fixed and unchangeable. In other words, motivation is a system which is complex, non-linear and unpredictable. How would you otherwise explain this statement?

“The thing that strikes me most is the fact that, despite all the maths that I learned at school, I’ve somehow managed to go on loving maths.”(*Albert Einstein*)

Language learning motivation and identity

This takes us to our second important issue, which is how language learners’ identity shapes their motivation, and, in turn, how motivation shapes identity. For a long time, the core concept in language learning motivation has been the opposition between *instrumental* motivation – or the desire to learn a language for the benefits it can offer – and *integrative* motivation – or the desire to

learn a language in order to approach and maybe even integrate into a different culture (Gardner and Lambert 1972, Gardner 1985, Gardner 2010). This fundamental difference still stands out very clearly if we look at what students say. In one of my surveys students were asked to complete either a description or a metaphor to say what “knowing a language” meant to them. Metaphors were particularly illuminating. Look at these examples: “*To know a foreign language is like ...*”

(6) “making an effort to pass my exams” (*Aldo, 15*)

(7) “doing something useful, because you can use a foreign language, you can speak it, not like, for instance, maths, which is of no use to me in my free time” (*Gabriella, 17*)

(8) “something new which you can use at any time, the imaginary passport to travel” (*Giuliana, 15*)

(9) “making a long-term investment” (*Pino, 15*)

What is important to note about these metaphors is the fact that *instrumental* motivation covers a wide range of motives – from passing exams to securing job opportunities to storing away a tool for future use – but in every case one is motivated by the *purposes* which a language serves or the *benefits* it can yield. However, notice that these motives also range from what we would call an *external* regulation – like having good grades in order to get a reward or avoid punishment at home – to motives which are more *interiorized* and *integrated* into an individual’s identity – like getting oneself ready for university or a job, or widening one’s cultural knowledge and skills⁵. This means that people are motivated by a wide range of different, even conflicting, reasons, which are all valuable for learning, and which, together, make up a person’s individual *motivational profile*. In other words, there is no single most important motivational factor and we need to appreciate each motivational profile. This means that, rather than asking a quantitative question like, *How much motivation have I got?*, we should try to ask a more qualitative question like, *In how many different ways am I motivated?*

In addition to – but, as I have just pointed out, not in contrast to – these kinds of instrumental motivation, students often expressed more *integrative* motives:

(10) “being able to become “a foreigner” and being considered as such” (*Daniele, 15*)

(11) “feeling at home wherever you go ... feeling like a real Englishman, German, Frenchman, etc.” (*Simone, 17*)

(12) “changing my nationality, therefore I should know a language perfectly” (*Paola, 16*)

(13) “enter the logic and frame of mind, first of the people who speak the language, and then of the language itself” (*Elena, 18*)

Here the focus is clearly, not just on getting to know a language better or getting to appreciate a different culture, but rather on more subtle ways of changing one’s ways of thinking and behaving in order to become part of another community. Notice that this longing to become a recognized member of another community can imply unrealistic expectations in terms of the required language level. Several students expressed the wish to know a language “perfectly” or just like a mother-tongue speaker: the ideal native speaker seems to be a very attractive image, although it is nothing more than a myth⁶. Some students, however, go even further:

⁵ According to another well-known perspective on motivation, such purposes in learning a language would be termed *extrinsic*, in opposition to *intrinsic* motives, which would imply the pleasure of learning for the sake of the activity itself, without any external pressure or the search for the benefits it can yield (this opposition is part of what has been called *self-determination theory*: see Deci and Ryan 1985, Deci and Ryan 2002). The extrinsic vs intrinsic and the instrumental vs integrative continua do not overlap, and have for a long time been considered different kinds of constructs (however, for a possible integration see Noels et al. 2000 and Noels 2001). Research (e.g. Noels 2001), as would be expected, confirms that the integrative orientation can be related to more self-regulated forms of motivation, and that the instrumental orientation can be more easily associated with external regulation.

⁶ On myths about bilingualism see Grosjean 2010.

- (14) “becoming another person, almost changing your personality and way of being” (*Grazia, 17*)
 (15) “being two people at the same time” (*Cesare, 19*)
 (16) “playing various roles, interpreting a character, changing one’s voice and way of thinking (I think like a German, a Frenchman, an Englishman)” (*Silvana, 16*)

This really confirms what we have always thought about language learning: learning a language is different from other kinds of learning precisely because it does not just imply acquiring new knowledge and developing new skills, but it can really offer opportunities for change and for experiencing new dimensions of your personality. Put it differently, language learning can have a powerful impact on your way of being – from the more superficial level of “playing a role”, as in (16) above to a deeper sense of inner change (14).

However, these “voices from the classroom” also take us beyond the simple *instrumental vs integrative* opposition. Something different is clearly developing in the motivational profile of many language learners:

- (17) “belonging to a group of people who communicate through the same language” (*Giovanni, 15*)
 (18) “opening up to the world, being free to express oneself to the world and integrate at a global level ...” (*Liliana, 18*)
 (19) “adjusting to other people’s ways of communicating” (*Emilio, 18*)
 (20) “belonging more to the world” (*Annalisa, 18*)

What these students seem to stress here is not just a generic integrative orientation – it is rather the wish to become part of a more extended, global community of speakers, so that you can become, as one of these students put it, a “citizen of the world”. It seems to me that this mirrors the change in the role that languages, especially global languages such as English, have started to play in the new global village. “World Englishes”, or “English as a Lingua Franca) (ELF), for example, now work as a bridge and a network between peoples and cultures well beyond the traditional native speaker-non native speaker interactions. All this has deep implications for language learning motivation, and has led researchers to stress the impact of language learning on the individual self. Dörnyei, for example, has introduced the concept of the “Ideal L2 Self”: “If the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the *ideal L2 self* is a powerful motivator to learn the L2” (Dörnyei 2010: 79). And Arnett adds that “the pressure for most people is to develop a bicultural identity, in which part of their identity is rooted in their local culture while another part is associated with a global identity that links them to the international mainstream” (Arnett 2002: 774). In other words,

“... an integrative and instrumental orientation are difficult to distinguish as separate concepts. Meeting with westerners⁷, using computers, understanding pop songs, studying or travelling abroad, pursuing a desirable career – all these aspirations are associated with each other and with English as an integral part of the globalization processes that are transforming their society and will profoundly affect their own lives.” (Lamb 2004: 15)

I think we can appreciate how all this is particularly relevant for teenage students: they are not just developing their identity as (language) learners but are also experiencing a sense of global citizenship.

At this point one might quite rightly ask, “But what about *intrinsic* motivation? Do our students ever feel happy with just learning a language for pleasure or fun? Do they always need some kind of

⁷ The research this quotation refers to was carried out in junior high schools in Indonesia.

external focus?” When they were asked to provide a metaphor to complete the statement “*Learning a language is like ...*”, some of them wrote:

- (21) “listening to a song” (*Giuliana, 15*)
- (22) “playing football – absolutely necessary” (*Maurizio, 17*)
- (23) “picking a rose. You have to be careful with thorns, but this is no problem compared with its beauty and scent” (*Emma, 19*)
- (24) “solving a riddle” (*Luisa, 18*)
- (25) “eating a sandwich with nutella 😊” (*Ivan, 18*)

As you can see, many students do indeed enjoy language learning as a kind of pleasant experience, a game, something which is fun in itself, quite apart from the benefits one can earn. This is what we would call *intrinsic* motivation, which implies, and I think this is most important for task planning and implementation, not just *affective* involvement but, at the same time, a real *cognitive* challenge, as Luisa says in (24) above.

In sharp contrast to these statements, or, so to say, at the other end of the range, we find students saying things like:

- (26) “knowing everything about football, all the players’ faces ... it’s impossible” (*Fabrizio, 15*)
- (27) “walking on the water ... impossible” (*Giuliana, 15*)
- (28) “playing chess without the chessboard” (*Nicola, 18*)
- (29) “eating what I hate” (*Michele, 15*)
- (30) “go on a military campaign with very little probability of winning” (*Emanuele, 15*)
- (30) “going on a long trip with no destination” (*Veronica, 16*)
- (31) “having to learn something which has nothing to do with me” (*Roberto, 16*)

These students clearly point to some kind of demotivation, or rather, “learned helplessness”: through a repeated series of failures at school, they seem to have come to the sad conclusion that they are not equipped with the tools for learning – they painfully express a feeling of very low self-efficacy, and even a feeling of unrelatedness, as if they were not in a position to find a link between themselves and language learning. Notice that these students do not question the *value* of language learning – they rather question their own personal *ability* to cope with learning itself.

Motivation and attributional styles

This personal, subjective *perception of ability*, which may not correspond to any concrete evidence, is a crucial issue in motivation, and it leads us to consider what actually happens – or does not happen – in the classroom, when students are actually engaged in language learning tasks. What is at stake here is the interplay between *task value* and *expectancy of success*. We have just seen that to engage in learning – that is, to start off but also to keep going even when problems emerge – we need two essential conditions: on the one hand, we need to give *value* to the task, to see that the task is interesting and relevant to us, but on the other hand we need to believe that we can make it, we need to have a minimum of self-confidence in our own ability to cope with the task – this is what creates an *expectancy of success*.

What does this perception depend on? When I asked students what they thought was important in producing success or failure at school, and also what they could do about it or what should happen for them to be successful, this is what some of them wrote:

- (32) “A miracle” (*Luca, 14*)
- (33) “If you’re lucky to have a good teacher, that’s the most important thing! Either your teachers are incompetent or they’re tyrants! Everything depends on the teacher, my school results are there to prove that!” (*Patrizia, 17*)
- (34) “Once the teacher was in a good mood and she didn’t notice a few mistakes in my presentation.” (*Massimo, 16*)
- (35) “Luck is a deceptive illusion, although it has an impact on outcomes; you need to optimize your preparation, results crop well, like mushrooms.” (*Giancarlo, 16*)
- (36) “Some tests are based mainly on personal ability and studying hard doesn’t count much.” (*Marta, 17*)
- (37) “Intelligence and personal ability affect your study method and your interest because if you try hard but are not intelligent, you can’t get good results.” (*Tiziano, 16*)

These statements point to the famous (or infamous!) causal attributions, or the perceptions that people have about the cause of their success or failure. We know that it is a tendency of human beings to try and explain the reasons behind what happens, so it is only natural that students should develop theories about these reasons – and it is precisely these beliefs and attitudes that eventually shape their reactions to learning tasks. It is easy to see that if you believe that luck or chance is what really matters, as in (33) and (34) above, then you are making an attribution which is at the same time *external* to you and very *unstable*. On the other hand, if you believe that natural inborn *ability*, or language aptitude, and general *intelligence* are the most important factors, as in (36) and (37) above, then you are making an attribution which is both *internal* (since you are banking on your genetic endowment), and *stable* (because it is generally believed that you cannot do much to change your natural gifts).⁸ Of course, as teachers, we would like to promote an *attributional style* which has *personal effort* at the core, or rather, as we shall soon see, effort supported by appropriate *learning strategies*: this attribution would be both *internal* (because it demands personal commitment), and *unstable* (because you can put in more effort if what you have done so far is not enough). Perhaps this is, at least in part, what Giancarlo (35) is referring to when he talks about “optimizing your preparation”.

So, in a way, *in the working context of the classroom*, learners are constantly, although very often unconsciously, asking themselves such crucial questions as, *Am I bright enough? Can I meet this challenge? Do I have a flair for languages?* Again, it is easy to see that beliefs about learning, about languages and about oneself as a language learner are very closely connected: through the tasks that we set in the classroom, and, most importantly, through the interaction with them, we would like our students to develop a sense of *self-efficacy* based on a combination of *effort* and *ability*. In other words, we would like them to meet the challenge of tasks which are within their *ability level* but also require a reasonable, though not exceptional, amount of *personal effort* (combined with the use of learning strategies).

The motivational value of learning tasks

By examining the construct of *expectancy of success* we have approached only half of the “recipe” for language learning motivation. The other half takes us back to the *motivational value* of learning tasks. Students’ voices seem to point to a few very clear issues:

⁸ In addition to the two original dimensions of attributions, i.e. *stability* (stable/unstable) and *locus of control* (internal/external), Weiner, the main exponent of the attributional theory, later added a third dimension (Weiner 1979, 1986), which refers to the control that individuals can exercise on the perceived causes of their success or failure.

(38) “I remember with delight a very nice project we did in the first grade, it was called ‘Progetto Cartabianca’. A group of students had to write articles on various topics for a daily paper, adding pictures and ads. Being part of the group was exciting and instructive, we were in perfect harmony and we were able to produce some very good work and even entered a competition.” (*Rosanna, 17*)

This student reminds us of a well-known principle: a learning task stands more chances of being accepted if it links directly with the students’ own needs and interests, to their own direct experience – but, at the same time, a task also needs to have a clear goal, it must lead to some kind of explicit and shared product: in this way it is more likely that students will see its *usefulness* as well as its *relevance*.

(39) “I feel motivated in those subjects or projects where studying is not enough, where you have to use your head and be creative, maybe cooperating with other people – in a word, activities which combine different subjects and personal experience.” (*Mara, 17*)

(40) “Surely one of the best experiences was the guided tour in Aosta because, besides missing some class time, each student had to present a monument to the other students.” (*Massimo, 14*)

As you can see, motivation can also come from ... missing lessons! (And it can be a powerful motivator indeed!) However, the crucial thing in these statements is that students seem to enjoy tasks which go beyond mere repetition or reproduction – they seem to value projects where they have to ask questions, explore topics, generate and solve problems, use their heads in a creative way, especially if you do it with other students, in a cooperative way. Even a young student like Massimo (40), combines missing lessons with the satisfaction of doing a personal job with a special audience – i.e. his classmates – in mind. So the key motivational factors here are *attention* and *personal involvement*.

(41) “I liked an English project on an American author because, starting from a book we had read in class, we had to give a sort of a lesson to explain to those who hadn’t read the book why the book in question was so important. I liked that because I was able to prove that I can explain myself in a simple but thorough way without help from the teacher or a classmate.” (*Lorenzo, 18*)

(42) “I feel motivated when you put the theory you’ve studied into practice, and when you do exercises in class, under the teacher’s guide, so that you can then realize if you could have done that exercise just as well by yourself.” (*Roberta, 17*)

(43) “For instance, at the moment, working in groups, we have to present and explain to our classmates some topics we have to study and understand at home. I think this is useful and is evidence of great maturity (for those who can make it).” (*Andrea, 14*)

A picture comes to my mind to briefly comment on these statements: think of a teacher dangerously edging her way on a tight rope, always trying to keep her balance between the need to provide appropriate *challenges* and the need to provide a corresponding appropriate level of *support*. The balance between challenge and support is crucial for task motivation. These teenage students seem to say that they need a chance to show that they can do things on their own – in other words, they strive for some level of *learner autonomy* - but at the same time they recognize that they also need some kind of *scaffolding*, some kind of graded facilitation provided by their teachers. Closely linked to this is what these other students say:

(44) “Lessons should involve the student, teachers shouldn’t rush them. The results of tests should be clear and there should be a time after the test to discuss mistakes and how to do better (something which is always missing).” (*Franco, 18*)

(45) “This was gratifying because the teacher collected the reports and then they were compared in class and for every student there was some constructive criticism in addition to compliments and a ‘small bonus on marks’.” (*Ada, 16*)

Because challenge and support need to be so finely tuned, *feedback* becomes essential. Evaluation and assessment play a major role in the motivational value of tasks precisely because they provide students (and teachers) with a view on what has or has not been done and what still needs to be done. Feedback starts from the recent past but points forwards to the near future. Notice the words that these students use in connection with what we now call *formative assessment* and *assessment for learning*: students’ involvement, clear performance criteria, space and time for discussion, shared class work, constructive criticism. They are keywords that seem to provide a “road map” to manage the balance of challenge and support⁹.

So we see that it is not just teachers who must keep this balance – students, too, experience the same conflict. Let’s go back to the student who said: “I think this is useful and is evidence of great maturity (for those who can make it)” (43). These words in brackets (“for those who can make it”) are the ones that most intrigue and worry me. This student seems to say that the process of finding a balance is not easy and straightforward, and certainly it is not so for everybody. In fact, some students do *not* make it, and if they are given a chance to talk and explain, they say it very clearly, sometimes in a painful way. When I asked them what they should do to get better school results, here is what some of them said:

(46) “Pay more attention when we have a literature lesson instead of falling asleep on my desk.” (*Domenico, 14*)

(47) “Cheating as much as I can” (*Martino, 15*)

(48) “Cheat, cheat and cheat again” (*Antonio, 15*)

And in answer to the next question, i.e. whether they had found ways to study difficult topics or carry out boring tasks, many students, and I would say *too many* students, simply *did not answer*. Others said:

(49) “Reading to my puppets pretending to speak to my pupils. For boring tasks, do them immediately so that I can go out without thinking about my homework.” (*Ines, 12*)

(50) “If I don’t like the topic, I study by heart and can’t understand anything. If a subject is boring, sometimes, although I try to study it, I can’t understand anything.” (*Marisa, 16*)

(51) “Yes, I’ve found a way to study which is easier and fun: studying with friends, because if we study like that it’s fun and often, afterwards, during the class test we remember something funny we said and thanks to that we remember things.” (*Simone, 16*)

(52) “I read a text several times and then make a summary at the side for almost every point. It’s a hell of a job and doesn’t lead me anywhere. But I have to do it ...” (*Giuseppe, 14*)

I have a feeling that some of these students are at a loss about what to do not just when they have to *start* working on a task, but also, and even more so, when they have to *carry on* a task. In other words, it is difficult to find the initial motivation, but it is even more difficult to sustain motivation during the task, that is, to keep going in spite of problems and dwindling effort and decreasing

⁹ The *quality* of teacher feedback is crucial: in contrast to a “controlling” type of feedback, which is general, casual, judgmental, based on inference, focussed on the person and isolated performances, prompting comparison with others and stressing ability only or external causes (like ease of the task itself or simple luck), we should be aiming at an “(in)formative” feedback, which is specific, systematic, descriptive, based on observation and explicit evaluation criteria, focussed on mastery objectives and each student’s own improvement, and stressing ability *together with* effort, i.e. internal causes (Mariani 2006).

interest. It is here that motivation and learning strategies might meet. If by “strategy” we mean, a bit provocatively, “Knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do”, then we must say that many of these students are not strategic: they lack, to different degrees, *self-regulation*, the ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. So I would say that we can add to the motivational value of tasks by including a feature of *strategic self-regulation*. We can imagine a “motivational loop” like this:

- a task promotes the use of *strategies*, by providing challenging input, that is, input that raises problems but also offers the necessary *scaffolding* in terms of strategies;
- strategies are monitored and evaluated through student, peer and teacher *feedback*;
- success in task execution is explicitly attributed to the *effort* and commitment that students have put in *together with* the use of appropriate strategies;
- the experience of success and the relevant attributions create positive expectations both towards oneself (*self-esteem*) and towards the execution of future tasks (*self-efficacy*), thus creating the motivational conditions for further learning.

Conclusion

To conclude, and in light of the different dimensions that we have been discussing in this paper, I would like to summarize the reasons why I introduced motivation as a *situated, multi-dimensional* concept.

We started by admitting that motivation is both a *psychological* and a *sociocultural* concept, i.e. it is an example of *interaction* between the characteristics of individual people and the features of the contexts in which they live and work. Such interaction includes both a *macro-context*, which includes families, local communities and the society at large, and a *micro-context*, which for our purposes is the classroom and the dynamics between and among teachers and students, both as individuals and as groups.

Then we examined different types of motivation and considered the ways in which they help to shape the individual’s *identity* both as a person and, in particular, as a language learner and user. The *intrinsic vs extrinsic* continuum is strictly linked with the gradual “emancipation” of the learner towards less dependence from external sources of control and more internalized, intentional choices. Both *instrumental* and *integrative* orientations, too, help people to adjust to the demands of the environment by providing reasons for using language for their own purposes, on the one hand, and reasons for acquiring a sense of belonging and citizenship in a global community, on the other.

Although *attributional styles* are based on the individual’s perception of the causes of her/his success or failure, such perceptions are, once again, dependent on the experiences that people go through in the contexts of their lives and, in particular, on the feedback that teachers and schools provide, which can establish and reinforce particular attributions and, in turn, affect self-esteem, self-efficacy and the eventual expectancy of success.

Finally, we considered the features of learning tasks, which are the most concrete level at which the relationships between teachers, students and subject matter are put to the test. Several features of tasks contribute to their motivational value, but we stressed in particular the role of teacher and peer *feedback*, as the basis for assessment for learning, and the role of *self-regulation* as the main route towards strategy implementation, student empowerment, and confidence building.

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