

# **Motivation in SLA: Selecting an Appropriate Framework for Teachers**

Hamish Gillies

## **Abstract**

From 2003 to 2004 the author ran the English language program within a medium-sized Japanese shipping firm in western Japan. While the staff had varying modes and degrees of English use in their daily work, they generally displayed a lack of motivation to improve their English ability. In order to better understand this situation and discover ways of ameliorating it, the author researched frameworks for language learning motivation and in doing so came up with an original framework which was based primarily on Dornyei's (1994) extended framework, but also incorporated facets from Tremblay & Gardner (1995), and Williams & Burden (1997). The main underlying feature of the developed framework was seen as its suitability for application by language teachers. A summary of this research and the subsequent framework are presented, as well as an illustration of how the framework might be applied to a specific teaching context.

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to show how a framework for motivation in SLA can be applied to an EFL learning context. To achieve this purpose, I will first outline what such a framework should contain, then choose the most suitable framework available, justify my choice, but then show how it can be modified and supplemented, and finally illustrate ways in which could be applied to a specific teaching context in Japan.

## **2. What do language teachers need?**

Language teachers are not researchers in the strict sense of the term, in that they have neither the time nor necessarily sufficient interest to engage in research. However they have a very practical interest in what happens in their classroom and their sense of satisfaction is often dependent on their perception of the success of their lessons and the achievements of their students. Bearing this in mind, only until recently have teachers been able to benefit from the studies of researchers on the topic of motivation in SLA, as researchers have tried to shift the originally socio-psychological perspective to a more cognitive and practical focus applicable to the language classroom.

This research will help teachers when it helps teachers to answer the following questions: what motivation are my students bringing to the classroom? How does that motivation change over time? How can I intervene in order to maximize that motivation? Further, the research should be in a language and framework comprehensible to teachers. Finally, it should be flexible enough to be applicable to the wide range of language learning contexts across the world – a universal model

## **3. A Suitable Model**

Although several models and frameworks have emerged in the last decade to explain the complex workings of motivation in SLA, Dornyei's (1994) extended framework is the most useful starting point. In terms of foundations, it draws on a range of theories and empirical research, which is justified due to the widely-recognised complexity of motivation (Dornyei, 1998: 117). However, as will be observed in course of making modifications and additions later, I will also draw on Williams and Burden's (1997) extended framework and Tremblay and Gardner's

(1995) extended model (as reviewed in Dornyei, 1998).

First, Dornyei utilizes Gardner's distinction between integrative & instrumental motivation, subsuming them in the 'Language Level'. They are useful factors since the integrative motivation can be applied to the students' disposition to the L2, as opposed to the community itself, which is especially relevant in an EFL country such as Japan where learners may not be interested in living or working in the target community (cf Miyahara et al., 1997, as reviewed in Irie, 2003: 91-2). Instrumental motivation has also been found as a motivating factor in Japan (see Irie, 2003 for a review of recent studies).

However, Clement (1986), in a survey of Canadian university students, found 'self-confidence' to be the best predictor of language proficiency, as opposed to a desire to learn the L2 or a positive attitude to the L2 community. In response to this, Dornyei's framework includes this factor, creating a Learner Level to subsume it. Dornyei (1998: 123) further notes that Clement has extended the relevance of his self-confidence theory to EFL learning contexts, where integrative motivation may be less influential due to mainly indirect contact between learners and the target community, and instrumental motivation/orientation may be less influential than in ESL settings (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Lukmani, 1972).

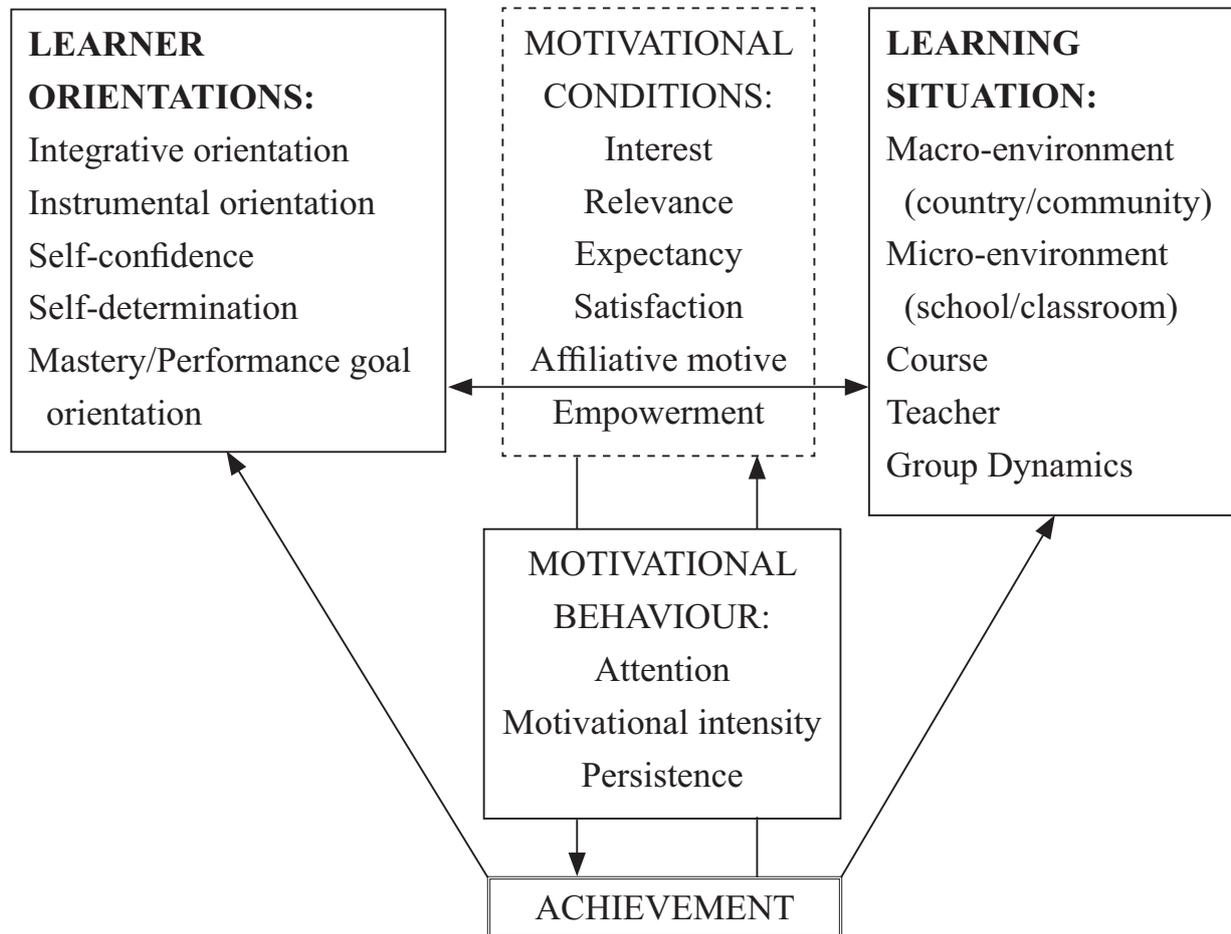
Finally, Dornyei's paradigm includes a relatively new sub-category, the Learning Situation Level. As with the other two levels, Dornyei (1998: 124) justifies this level on the basis of the findings of Clement et al.'s (1994) study of an EFL school context in Hungary, which applied Gardner's (1985) 'attitudes towards the learning situation factor' as an aspect of integrative motivation, recognizing how it was appropriate

to the EFL setting, where learning occurs in formal rather than naturalistic settings. Within this level, there is a practical division between course, teacher and group, each potentially influential on the motivation level of the student. In this sense, Dornyei is approaching the topic from a teacher's point of view, because his taxonomy of motivation is classroom orientated. Dornyei applies Keller's (1983) aspects of motivation (interest, relevance, expectancy, & satisfaction) to all three sub-divisions, more or less directly; these four conditions provide especially useful perspectives in educational situations (cf Crookes & Schmidt, 1989: 228). In addition, the inclusion of a teacher-specific category begins to recognize the crucial but under-researched factor of how a teacher's own motivation can be influential on that of his students (cf Dornyei, 1998: 130).

As a tool for teachers, it has the advantage of being applicable both as a raiser of teachers' awareness (i.e. in a teacher-training setting) and, with some adaptation, as a skeleton for a learner profile record, guiding teachers' approach to their particular group of students. This is due to the relevance of the sub-categories and the main focus being on the learning situation, which is where teachers have direct influence.

#### 4. Outline of modifications and additions

Figure 4.1: A revision of Dornyei's (1994) extended framework:



At the language level, I have subsumed the Language Level in Learner Level (substituting the term *level* with *orientations*), the latter serving as an outline of the learner per se, what they bring to the classroom, as they interact with the learning situation. I have followed Gardner (eg 1996) in terming the 2 elements as orientations as opposed to motivations, since motivation is overall system. Self-determination has also been added as a specific learner orientation, in response to the empirical research in classroom settings which shows that students who are active learners and exert more control over their learning are more likely to achieve

proficiency than those who don't (cf. Holec, 1980 and 1987; Dickenson, 1987; as referred to in Dornyei, 1998); while Dornyei (1998: 124) refers to recent reviews of research showing that learner autonomy and L2 motivation are directly related.

Finally I have specifically added the mastery/performance goal orientation, in response to Irie's (2003: 94-7) review of recent related studies of Japanese learners which shows that they are motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically; and further that the performance goal orientation may turn out to be demotivating, since once the incentive is removed (eg achieving entry into university) the motivation will concomitantly diminish (cf Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991); however Irie also notes that mastery/performance goal orientation has not specifically been used as a factor in studies in Japan, hence more empirical data is required.

In the *Learning Situation* category, I have added macro and micro environmental aspects, which are adapted from similar features on the list of external factors in Williams and Burden's (1997) extended framework. The macro-environment is intended to include the status of the L2 (in this case English) in the learners' country; Lightbown and Spada (1993: 40) point to the 'power relationship' between the L1 and the L2 as an example of how the wider social context can have effect on a learner's motivation. In the case of business English learners, another macro-environmental factor would be their requirement by the company to attend classes (distinct from instrumental motivation since it is not a desire as such). The micro-environment is intended to match 'The learning environment' sub-heading in Williams and Burden's (1997) extended framework.

As can be seen by the flow-diagrammatic nature of my framework, I am aiming

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to respond to Dornyei's (1998: 126) own criticism of Dornyei's (1994a) extended framework, that it 'lacks an indication of any relationships between the components and hence cannot be seen as a motivation model proper.' In this regard I have noted the advantageously dynamic nature of Tremblay and Gardner's (1995) extended model, and hence in my model, the relationship is a dynamic and bidirectional one between the attitudes and pre-dispositions of the learner and the characteristics of the learning situation. Within this interactive process of motivation, a third category, *Motivational Conditions*, has been included to represent the critical moment where motivation is created or dissipated; included here are Keller's (1983) conditions of motivation and elements of human needs, the one adjustment being the combination of 'outcome' and 'need for achievement' into the single variable 'satisfaction' as per Dornyei's framework. As an example of the interactive process, if the course meets the needs of the learner (i.e. their instrumental orientation), then the learner is likely to be motivated due to the motivational condition of relevance. Another example might be if the teacher appeals to the learner's self-determination by allowing him to be involved in classroom decision-making, then the learner is likely to be motivated due to the motivational condition of empowerment. As these two examples show, a teacher would approach the interactive process from the right-hand side of the model, where he has direct control over his own behaviour, and a varying degree of control over the course, group-dynamics, and the micro-environment.

The product of the above interaction is motivation, or to be more precise 'motivational behaviour'. Again, this category, with its three components, *attention*, *motivational intensity*, and *persistence*, has been taken from Tremblay and Gardner's (1995) extended model. They in turn drew on Maehr and Archer's (1987) outline of four key behavioral aspects of motivation, choosing to omit *continuing motivation*.

These are important in any model of motivation, since they begin to explain why motivation can lead to language proficiency; hence, in both Tremblay and Gardner's (1995) extended model and in my model, they link the variables of the learner (and the learning situation, in the case of my model) with the end product, *achievement*. Achievement is intended to refer to improvement in the learner's L2 proficiency. Dornyei (1998: 131) calls for an analysis of the 'temporal organization of motivation', i.e. what happens when, in the process of motivation. Hence my model has aimed to suggest that the process of interaction between the learner and the learning situation, and the subsequent development of motivational behavior and achievement, is an ongoing process, which fuels itself, in that achievement itself has a motivating effect on the learner. The model also suggests that achievement can modify the attitudes and predispositions of the learner, again on an ongoing basis; and it can also modify the nature of the elements which make up the learning situation. For example, achievement may make a learner more self-determined, or integratively orientated; likewise, it may make the teacher reflect on his own methodology, confirming the success of a new method, or it may strengthen the group dynamics of the class.

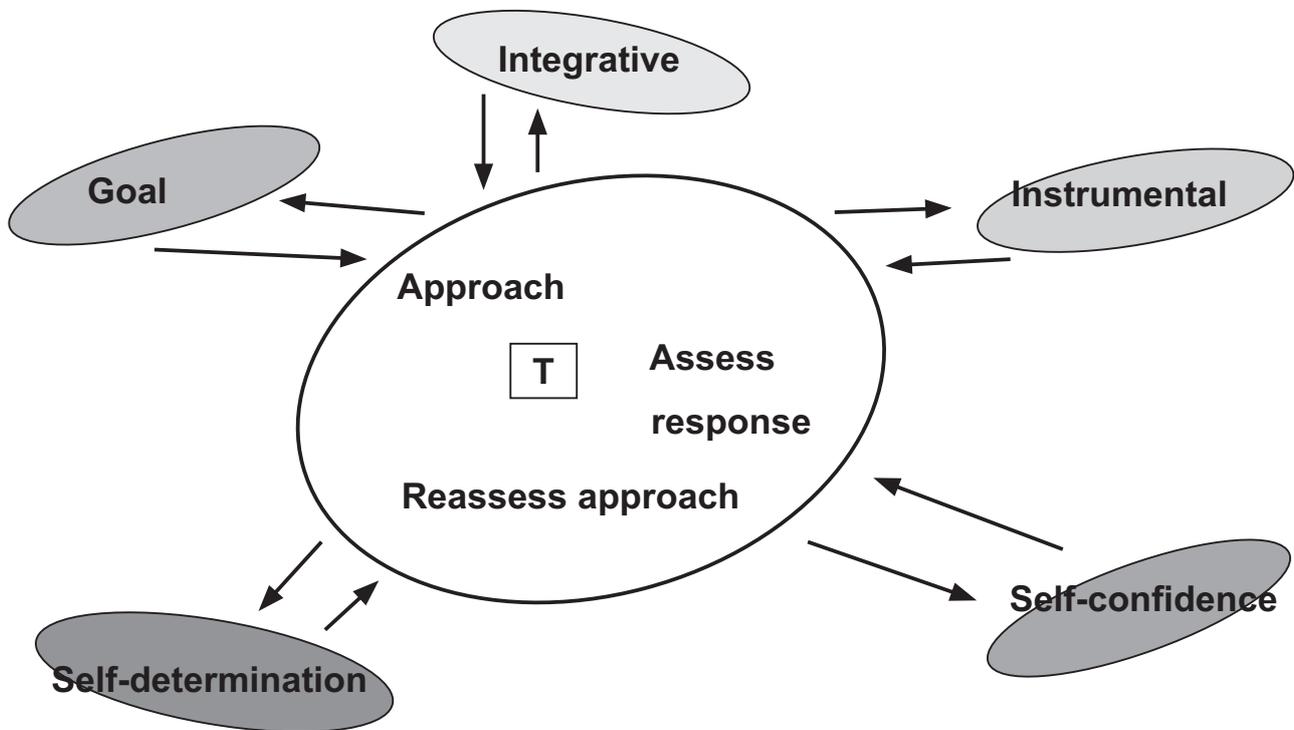
As suggested in the first section of this essay, any practical model of motivation in the language classroom needs to go beyond just a useful outlining of areas for teachers to be aware of, and show teachers the actual steps they need to take to maximize their SS' motivation. My model suggests that the teacher is a variable in the learning situation; in fact, the teacher is an important variable since he is a conscious, dynamic, human agent who has arguably the most significant influence on the learner, out of all the variables in the learning situation. The model also suggests that the teacher is able to interact with all the orientations of the learner, and

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try to activate them in order to achieve a positive response, i.e. the development of motivational energy. What the model doesn't outline yet is how he can do this.

Dornyei and Csizer's (1998) 'Ten commandments for motivating language learners' begins to suggest concrete measures, by giving teachers clear guidelines, based on empirical research, on how to motivate language learners. Hence such guidelines could be used as an extension of my motivation model, linking the teacher variable to the learner components. For example, the commandment '*familiarise the learners with the target language culture*' would be based on the interaction between the teacher (and indirectly the course and micro-environment) and the integrative orientation of the learners. Again I stress the term *interaction* since the teacher, especially at the beginning of a course, needs to probe his learners to find out what orientations are most applicable to them, and then direct his approach to feed that source of motivation.

Figure 4.2: The role of the teacher in language learner motivation: an appendix to my motivation model.



This interaction is outlined in Figure 4.2. It illustrates how the teacher should first approach (black arrows) each orientation of the learner, stimulate it, assess the response (blue arrows), and reassess the approach or redirect his efforts accordingly. Suitable approaches would be any of Dornyei and Csizer's (1998) 'Ten commandments for motivating language learners', as applicable to the orientations; so for example promoting learner autonomy would be an approach to stimulate the learner's self-determination. Finally, Figure 4.2 puts the teacher centre-stage, empowering him with a range of possible approaches to dealing with motivation levels in his classes.

The advantage of my model and the appendix is the flexibility which allows for

multi-context applicability. As Dornyei (1998: 128) states, ‘motivation is subject to considerable contextual variation’. This means that any model cannot be too specific in its suggestions, but rather guide teachers how to investigate their particular setting and SS. Students in Europe for example may be more responsive to a teacher promoting self-determination than students in Japan.

## **5. Possible application of the model to a specific teaching situation: outlining suggestions & strategies**

The language learners in the specific teaching situation are the staff of a shipping company in a small industrial town in western Japan. Key points are first that instrumental orientations amongst the staff vary due to varying use of English in day-to-day work; second, all staff have been through English learning up to high school level, following traditional Japanese teaching methods, so attributional processes may have given them a low integrative orientation, while inhibiting their self-determination; third, the latter condition may be being exacerbated by the external pressure of the company requiring them to attend classes and achieve a certain score in the TOEIC test; fourth and finally, most of the learners have only indirect contact with English speakers, and most of the latter are non-native speakers, English acting as the lingua franca, and so English study may be viewed as a necessary business tool, stripped of its cultural identity, rather than as a door into the culture of the target language community.

With this situation specifically in mind, I would interact initially with the SS’ instrumental orientation, both those who use English in their work now and those who may in the future. This means, manipulating the *course* variable, ensuring the relevance of course aims and materials, following a careful needs analysis with

regular updates. (In fact, it has been observed that those who use English more in day-to-day situations exhibit more motivation and attention in class). The greater sense of relevance would then lead to greater motivational behaviour, according to the motivation model.

The need for a good rapport between students and teacher is widely accepted, and within my model, I see this as interacting with the integrative orientation, to produce the affiliative motive, and lead to greater motivational behaviour; i.e. the teacher is the human embodiment of the learning situation (cf Gardner's, 1985, integrative motive construct's inclusion of a 'attitudes towards the learning situation factor') as an aspect of integrative motivation, and, being a native-speaker, a representative of the target language community and culture. Hence, a combination of professionalism and friendliness is suggested. It is also expected that, temporally speaking, the establishment of a good rapport may need to precede other approaches and strategies which rely on the students' trust in and positive attitude towards the teacher in order to succeed.

Turning to Self-confidence, it has been defined as 'self-perceptions of communicative competence and concomitant low levels of anxiety in using the second language' (Noels et al., 1996: 248). Self-confidence in this setting is not as high as one might expect from students working in international business, perhaps because the English they use is in very limited contexts (mainly written), where the register and genre is fairly constant and follows a house style. Further, low self-confidence is often associated with Japanese language learners in general, and seen as underlying their hesitant and ponderous style of spoken communication in English. It could be boosted by creating an atmosphere of communicative success

in the language classroom, for example by carefully preparing and setting tasks which are pitched to the learners' level and capacities, and by being on hand as an unobtrusive support; otherwise, the students will either experience failure or succeed but attribute their success to the teacher rather than their own abilities. Another simple but effective approach would be to praise the students regularly, in response to their efforts and achievements. Thus, by interacting with the learners' self-confidence, a greater sense of expectancy (i.e. a learner's perceived likelihood of success), can be produced, and hence motivational behaviour.

Connected with Self-confidence is the orientation of Self-determination, a form of intrinsic motivation whose application in L2 learning was mainly due to the work of Douglas Brown (e.g. 1994). In the current setting, trying to elicit the learners' self-determination may be a long process, considering the nature of their English study in mainstream education and the pressure exerted by the company to study every week and perform in regular tests. However, I could start trying to shift the 'locus of causality' and 'locus of control' (cf Williams & Burden's, 1997, framework) back towards the learners, by encouraging goal-setting and learning strategies amongst the learners. Crookes and Schmidt (1989: 240) refer to Baars' (1988) intriguing work on learner strategies, in which she emphasizes the importance of labeling goals and add weight to new goals by synthesizing them with long-held goals. In the current setting, the learners could be asked to brainstorm ways in which greater English proficiency could enhance their lives, both inside and outside of their career; and as an extension to this, they could come up with personal goals for their English learning; further, following Crookes & Schmidt's (1989: 238), a session at the start of the course could be devoted to the activity of goal-setting and strategy-forming. Lesson content could be personalized, for example by asking the students to talk

about their own lives rather than just the characters or situations offered by the textbook. The learners could also be encouraged to study freely outside class, for example by participating in email communication with the teacher (not only in the completion of homework tasks, but discussions, diaries, etc), while the teacher could reply and perhaps carbon copy his reply to the other students in the group. Finally, the learners could cooperate with the teacher in deciding topics and language points to be covered in the course, for example by asking the learners to mark or prioritize their preferences on a questionnaire (to make sure all learners in the group are able to give their input, in a society). Hence, by interacting with the learner's self-determination, a greater sense of interest and empowerment can be stimulated, thus cueing motivational behavior. However, in the current context, the short-term may see little success due again to societal norms which place the teacher in an elevated position, whereas students are below, and there is a one-way flow of input from teacher to student.

Hope is possible though, when we look at recent studies of Japanese university students of English, amongst whom there seem to be a proportion who respond positively to teaching approaches which encourage mastery goal orientation (cf Irie, 2003: 94,97, for a review of recent studies and findings). Mastery goal orientation, like Self-determination, is a form of intrinsic source of motivation. It stems from the joy of learning for learning's sake and the sense of fulfillment to be gained from achieving proficiency. In My model, by interacting with the learners' Mastery goal orientation, interest and satisfaction can be aroused, and so motivational behavior arises. As the teacher, I could ensure a variety of activities within the course of each lesson, encourage active learning, i.e. whereby the students ask questions regularly to satisfy curiosity, and generate curiosity in the first place.

## 6. Conclusion

The preceding analysis has attempted to show how a framework or model of motivation can be usefully applied to language learning in a specific context, in this case company classes in Japan. The analysis is perhaps in danger of vulnerability to Williams' (1994: 84, as quoted in Dornyei, 1989: 131) warning that 'there is no room for simplistic approaches to such complex issues as motivation.' However, at the very least it has tried to show that there are practical approaches available to teachers who find their 'well-planned' lessons losing out to unmotivated and inattentive students, in whatever context, and that these approaches are increasingly based on empirical research. Hence, in one sense, this essay has been just as much concerned with the motivating of language teachers as it has with motivating learners.

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