

# Initiation, preservation, and retrospection: The role of CLT in the L2 motivational process

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This paper examines the role Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), a popular language teaching approach, plays in second-language (L2) motivation by analyzing the characteristics of CLT in tandem with the motivational process. Using Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) model of L2 motivation as a framework, three major components of motivation are identified: (1) initiation, (2) preservation, and (3) retrospection. Based on these components, the role CLT plays at the various stages of the L2 motivational process, as identified by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), through initiation, preservation, and retrospection is investigated. In doing so, this study presents evidence of the importance CLT plays in fostering students' motivation, thereby advocating its effectiveness in ESL/EFL classrooms in Japan.

本論は、第2言語(L2)学習の一般的な語学教授法であるコミュニカティブ・ランゲージ・ティーチング(CLT)の役割を、動機づけの過程と並行してその特徴を説明することで検証した。Dörnyei & Ottó (1998)のL2学習における動機づけを枠組みとして使用し、動機づけの3つの主要な構成要素を(1)始まり、(2)維持、(3)回顧と識別した。これらの構成要素を基盤とし、L2学習の動機づけの様々な段階におけるCLTの役割を研究した。本論では、CLTが生徒のやる気を育てるのに重要な役割を担うことを例証し、日本のESL/EFLクラスに効果的であることを論じる。

Unarguably, motivation plays an important role in education and its effects on language learning have been well documented (see Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Krashen & Terrel, 1983; Sternberg, 2002). Though motivation is only one variable determining language learning success, research has shown that it is particularly important because of its ability to compensate for deficiencies in learners' aptitudes (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). What is of greatest concern to teachers, however, is the fact that motivation can be manipulated—it is not fixed but dynamic in nature (Dörnyei, 2005). This presents teachers with both the opportunity and responsibility to facilitate students' motivation, and, when done properly, assure learning success. Perhaps one of the most obvious and effective ways of accomplishing this is through implementation of teaching methods and approaches that assist in motivating students.

The purpose of this study is to examine an approach that appears to be particularly adept at this: Communicative Language Teaching, or CLT (Bingham, 1997; Hiep, 2007; Rabbini & Diem, 2006). To demonstrate the role CLT plays in L2 motivation, this study examines motivation in tandem with the components of CLT along a continuum. In doing so, theoretical corroboration is found that advocates the importance CLT plays in fostering motivation and its effectiveness in ESL/EFL classrooms in Japan.

## Communicative Language Teaching

### *The theory of communicative competence*

The approach of CLT is based on the theory of communicative competence. First proposed by Hymes (1972), the theory of communicative competence claims that to effectively communicate in a language, one must know how to use the language appropriately in regards to social and situational contexts. Though definitions of communicative competence may vary slightly (see Breen & Candlin, 1980; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1972, 1991, 2001), most agree that communication should be central to comprehension and production and should determine both the content and mode of learning. CLT emerged from this postulation. Therefore, CLT's goal is not simply to improve language skills, but to demonstrate the interdependence between communication and language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This is accomplished through classroom procedures that provide meaningful communicative interactions.

### *The importance of meaningful interaction*

CLT appreciates, however, that for a communicative interaction to be meaningful, it must be directly relevant to the learner beyond the classroom. Accordingly, development of communicative activities should be genuine for the learner. Moreover, CLT activities are designed to be cooperative not competitive. Because communication competence requires reciprocal actions, activities should not pit students against one another but encourage teamwork. In this way, students and their needs come before syllabi's objectives and emphasis is placed on structure in the function of language, rather than structure for the service of the function.

### *Meaning and correctness*

Critics of CLT, however, argue that exclusive emphasis on communication and lack of explicit instruction and correction could lead to early fossilization of errors (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), but to claim CLT is centered exclusively on meaning is somewhat of an exaggeration. Though CLT regards errors as less important, proponents of CLT do not recommend entirely abandoning the components of language. In fact, most studies have shown CLT positively contributes to L2 learners' fluency and communicative abilities when implemented alongside form-focused instruction (see Genesee, 1987; Harley &

Swain, 1984; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997; Savignon, 1972). Moreover, CLT views errors as an indication of learning progress and a basis on which to develop procedures which assist in improving those areas (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). This suggests that CLT is not meant to function as a lone approach but rather in collaboration with other methods to address learners' weaknesses without criticizing or condemning them for mistakes.

### Motivation

According to the above description, it is easy to envisage how CLT might contribute to the fostering of motivation among L2 learners; however, in order to form a more authoritative basis for this view, it is necessary to establish a practicable definition of motivation with which to proceed. The trouble is, however, motivation is a very complex psychological phenomenon with countless facets and is nearly impossible to thoroughly define within the limits of a single model. Even so, this does not mean that it is impossible to know what motivation looks like. In fact, according to Gardner (2005), a motivated person is identifiable in terms of two telltale conducts: (a) engagement in a goal-directed activity and (b) expenditure of effort to reach that goal.

### *The dynamic nature of motivation*

As Gardner (2005) explains, however, what complicates matters is that a goal can give rise to motivation within most anyone, but individual differences are found in what one does after becoming motivated; in other words, the extent to which effort is expended differs from person to person. Furthermore, a number of studies have shown that motivation can lose its intensity, particularly in school contexts (see Benson, 1991; Berwick & Ross, 1989; Dörnyei 2005; Tachibana, Matsukawa, & Zhong, 1996), demonstrating that motivation is continuously fluctuating (Dörnyei, 2005). This suggests that motivation must not only be initiated at some point, but must also be sustained from its point of instigation until the goal is acquired. From this perspective, motivation can be viewed as a process.

### *Motivation as a process*

The idea of motivation as a process is not a new concept. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) define motivation as "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs,

coordinates, amplifies, terminates and evaluates the cognitive and the motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and acted out" (p. 65), and derived a process model from this definition that identifies three stages within the evolution of motivation:

1. *Preactional Stage* – The learner must choose or have a reason to pursue a specific goal or task.
2. *Actional Stage* – The learner's attention and interest on the task at hand must be "maintained" and "protected."
3. *Postactional Stage* – The learner reflects back on his or her past experiences, which often determine the learner's future motivation.

The first stage implies an act of initiation—there must be a rationale behind the desire to pursue and a decision to commence the pursuit. The second stage suggests preservation, in that the individual must have a desire, will, or drive to continue towards that goal and consequently preserve the pursuit. The third and final stage addresses retrospection. At this stage, the concept that past experiences can dictate reactions towards the L2 and L2 community and thereby affect any future interactions is recognized. Using this model as a framework then, we can define motivation as a dynamic process of (1) initiation, (2) preservation, and (3) retrospection. Armed with this understanding, let us now explore how CLT assists to bring about and carry learners through this process.

## CLT in the motivational process

### *Initiation: Preactional Stage*

The Japanese Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines states the goals for English instruction in Japan are "to develop students' ability to understand and express themselves" (as cited in Savignon, 2001); nevertheless, much of the focus in ESL/EFL classrooms remains on grammatical and lexical aspects without any meaningful purpose behind the tasks (Brown, 2004). Of course, this is largely due in part to the exam-centered type of education that is prevalent in Japan.

Passing an exam can certainly motivate a student initially, but the fact is this motivation will inevitably lose momentum—it cannot maintain itself. Once the exam is completed, motivation is often lost because the student was only motivated for this one purpose: passing the exam (Takanashi, 1991). This is the case for a

large majority of Japanese junior high and high school students (LoCastro, 1996; Morrow, 1987). Therefore, despite the fact that examinations are capable of giving rise to motivation, initiation cannot be maintained; as a result, exams should not be considered a suitable method by which to initiate—let alone—preserve the motivational process. CLT, on the other hand, can help fulfill these factors in two ways.

Firstly, CLT is designed to be incorporated into other curricula as a way to better meet the individual needs of learners, so that everything students need to know to enter university can still be covered, while at the same time the focus of the class is being shifted to the learner (Savignon, 2001). Because of this, the student has the opportunity to choose why he or she is pursuing English (in addition to examinations) and what he or she would like to focus on in that pursuit, initiating the L2 motivational process. Secondly, because the student is studying for his or her own "self-perceived goal" beyond the purpose of passing an examination, CLT effectively sustains him or her while at the preactional stage, which easily leads the learner into the actional stage.

### *Preservation: Actional Stage*

Because of the rather long span of time it takes to acquire a language, maintaining and preserving students' motivation is an important aspect of learning English (Dörnyei, 2005). Though CLT may present a way from stage one to stage two, the responsibility of holding students' interest in English rests on the shoulders of the teacher. This, however, does not mean CLT is ineffective at preservation; only that the teacher must consider appropriate ways to implement the approach to sustain motivation.

As discussed earlier, activities in CLT should be genuine and authentic so that students feel they are applicable to their lives. In Japan, for example, ordering at a restaurant in English is generally not considered an "authentic" task and therefore would not be effective at preserving most students' motivation since such a task lacks practical applicability for them. Additionally, conversational English may be useful for students who regularly experience intercultural contact (Kormos & Csizér, 2007), but the reality is that direct direct contact with English-speaking foreigners is minimal for the majority of Japanese. This does not suggest, however, that Japanese are not exposed to English. In fact, Japanese are regularly exposed to what Kormos

and Csizér (2007) term, “L2 cultural products.” Teachers in Japan can take advantage of this.

Foreign television programs, movies, and music enjoy great popularity among Japanese. Implementing these sorts of cultural products into the CLT classroom can be one effective way of preserving, as well as increasing, learners' interests in English, and, thereby, their motivation to study and learn. And, because English is a foreign language in Japan, indirect contact, that is, contact with “cultural products,” is much more likely to occur. As a result, students' motivation will be more easily maintained and protected than with tasks that do not represent authentic experiences with the language (Kormos & Csizér, 2007).

Furthermore, exposure to such cultural products has a profound effect on learners' perspectives and attitudes (Kormos & Csizér, 2007). According to Gardner (1982, 2005), attitude is important because it dictates one's reactions towards the L2 and L2 community, and those reactions are usually determined by past experiences with the L2. By presenting students with positive interactions with the target language, CLT assists in both preserving motivation and providing experiences on which students can favorably reflect, thereby ushering in the third and final stage of the L2 motivational process: the postactional stage.

### *Retrospection: Postactional Stage*

The majority of Japanese ESL/EFL learners are aware of the importance of English in today's ever-globalizing world. In fact, most Japanese hold bilingualism in high regard and consider it to be a highly attractive attribute, and more and more domestic companies are requiring their employees to be proficient in a foreign language, usually English. Yet despite these positive perspectives/attitudes, it is not uncommon for learners to continue to wrestle with their negative past experiences with English.

In her study of unsuccessful language learners, Nikolov (2001) found that, in spite of a favorable view of speaking foreign languages, participants struggled to get past the adverse learning conditions one must suffer through to learn those languages. Japanese often acknowledge English as a useful language to know, but complain about how difficult it is to learn. Many grow disillusioned with English, citing rote memorization of vocabulary, overly complicated grammar,

and indecipherable pronunciation as negative motivational factors.

As Dörnyei (2005) explains, students who fail because of what they believe to be the result of their own ability or lack thereof, are generally reluctant to continue learning a L2, resulting in the motivational process petering out at this point. This can be truly devastating to a learner's motivation because, if this occurs, it is unlikely the process will be reinitiated in the future. CLT, however, can assure that this does not happen.

Because CLT should operate at only one step beyond the learner's level—in accordance with Krashen's (1981) Input Hypothesis, which states that acquisition occurs when L2 learners receive comprehensible input ( $i+1$ ),  $i$  representing language competence and  $+1$  representing input above this level—a learner should never feel incapable in a CLT classroom. Furthermore, due to CLT's focus on communicative interaction over correctness, students' participation in the activities, rather than their performance, should take center stage in regards to student assessment. This eliminates the need for formal grading where students are made aware of each and every mistake. Instead, CLT teachers can focus on students' strengths and build their confidence, thereby providing students with a positive experience, rather than one in which they feel is representative of their failures and poor abilities.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have explored how CLT creates an interest and excites students about English by focusing on the learners and their needs and desires, providing them with meaningful purposes for learning beyond extrinsic factors such as passing an examination, thereby initiating the preactional stage of L2 motivation. We have also seen that CLT preserves that interest and excitement among students at the actional stage by considering students' direct and indirect exposure to English and creating authentic tasks accordingly. Lastly, we have observed how CLT offers students an enjoyable experience that they can look back on favorably and, in turn, preserve that motivation to learn English in future activities at the postactional stage. By taking individual learners' abilities into account and never overwhelming them or exceeding their levels, CLT can help to encourage students in their pursuit of L2 acquisition. Observing CLT in the context with the motivational process, as identi-

fied by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), we have come to a better understanding of the role CLT plays in motivation. Furthermore, we have demonstrated and identified not only why CLT is effective at motivating students, but also in what ways it is effective. In doing so, this study has presented the advantages of applying CLT in ESL/EFL classrooms in Japan.

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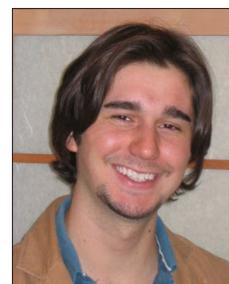
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