

**EXAMINING HOSPITALITY STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO ACQUIRE A
SECOND LANGUAGE AT THIRD LEVEL**

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Abstract

Since the middle of the last century, global tourism has developed rapidly into an industry which encompasses a vast range of ethnic and linguistic diversities. In order to embrace such diversity, the hospitality industry requires workers who can meet the demands of its multicultural customers. Apart from having the necessary practical skills required to work in the industry, workers also need to be good and effective communicators in more than one language. Acquiring a second language not only allows for linguistic exchanges but also promotes a better understanding of cultural differences. If hospitality workers are not encouraged to become effective communicators in other languages than this can have an adverse effect on an industry which is heavily reliant on foreign markets. An effective way to promote language learning in the industry is to develop the interest of hospitality students while at 3rd level. Institutes teaching hospitality courses need to maximise student learning in order to yield positive results in language acquisition. This can be achieved by assessing what motivates students to study a second language and implementing teaching strategies which incorporate these motivational forces into the language curriculum.

The Shannon College of Hotel Management was chosen as a case study to explore the type of motivation which influences its students in the language classroom and then using this information to formulate possible teaching strategies which could be used to optimise student learning.

Relevance of languages in the hospitality industry

Over the last few decades, the hospitality industry has become a strong economic force worth an estimated £270 billion on the global market. It provides mass employment with statistics showing that 1 in every 5 jobs created in the UK are in the hospitality sector (<http://www.ca.courses-careers.com/hospitality2.htm>). Such opportunities have led to mass migration and today many businesses in the hospitality industry employ people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Ability to communicate in more than one language is a necessity for this industry. Being competent in a second language if not more, can help foster good work practices by reducing language barriers. Language barriers can ‘effect cross cultural knowledge sharing, dialogue, relationship building and networking’ (Bonache & Brewster, 2001 cited in Luring, 2007: 255). Apart from the establishment of good workplace communication, hospitality workers also need to be able to engage with guests and this is where being competent in a second language becomes vital to the industry. According to Jayawardena (2001:313) ‘to sustain a thriving tourism industry, the host population must also be educated in the requirements of their target market.’

Many institutes around the world offer courses in hospitality. The majority of these courses are heavily orientated towards providing their students with the necessary practical training and business skills required to ensure a successful career in the industry. And one skill which is as equally important as practical training and business acumen is the ability to communicate in more than one language. However, languages are often overlooked by students as being an integral part of their education with preference and division of time being given more generously to other subjects. This does not mean that language learning is a redundant subject but rather a challenge which institutes can overcome by showing students that languages are ‘an integrated component of effective international businesses’ (Embleton 1992:4). In order to promote active language learning institutes need to adopt new strategies as ‘language training requires a strategy within an integrated language strategy – simply because of the vast range of choices and their associated pitfalls’ (Hagen 1992:49). One way of determining an effective strategy is to assess the motivational forces which drive students to learn a second language. Research carried out over the years has always proven that ‘well motivated classroom learners perceive their progress and

are encouraged by it, and this in turn motivates further effort and further success' (Coleman 1995:16).

Research rationale

The aim of this paper is to assess the motivational forces which influence hospitality students to acquire a second language and then using this information to identify teaching strategies which can be tailored to promote greater interest by targeting the specific needs of the students. In order to achieve this, students at the Shannon College of Hotel Management (SCHM) were surveyed. The SCHM provides students with a comprehensive education of the hospitality sector and students are placed directly into hotels around Europe for their Year Two placement. It is this placement facility which allows for more in-depth examination of the needs of pre-placement (Year One) students and post-placement (Year Three and Four) students. For the purposes of this paper, the terms 'target culture' and 'target language' will be used to refer to the languages studied by the students.

Difficulties of Language Acquisition

From Plato's work *Cratylus* (c.360 B.C.) to the more recent field of cognitive linguistics much in-depth study has been carried out into the origins and functions of language with it all culminating in the fact that language is a complex communicative system. Language is not just words – it is a complex syntactic and semantic system deeply embedded with cultural and social references. In order to interpret language, the listener/reader needs to have social knowledge of the world. As Gibson (1999:21) states 'language does not exist in a (social) vacuum. Before any utterance is made or sentence written, there is a set of circumstances – a context operating'. A further development of this idea is Hymes' ethnography of communication. The ethnography of communication proposes that in order to attain complete competence in a language the knowledge of the speaker must exceed beyond the boundaries of grammar to possess an inherent cultural knowledge. It is only through the merging of grammatical knowledge with that of culture that the meaning of a language can be interpreted (Goddard 1998:342).

With such heterogeneous features, it is of no surprise that many learners find it difficult to learn a new language. According to Barkhuizen (cited in Davies, A. and Elder, C. 2006:552) learning a new language can be a daunting experience as ‘there not only exists the awesome task of mastering the grammatical system of the language but also the job of learning how to utilize this system appropriately and effectively when actually communicating in real-life situations’. Learning a language is not a simple feat as the learner is faced with many challenges. It is, therefore, easy to conceive reasons why hospitality students specialising in the business and managerial aspects of the industry would be reluctant to spend much time on learning a second language. There is a ‘long held assumption that modern languages are an academic subject and are somehow separate from the worlds of industry and commerce’ (Embleton 1992:3). Learning a language provides not only opportunities to communicate with guests and colleagues from different linguistic backgrounds but also provides training which can enhance management performance. Language is ‘a necessary instrument to access knowledge and participate in it... in most workplaces in Europe, communicative competencies are demanded from all employees at all hierarchical levels’ (Grünhage-Monetti, Halewijn & Holland 2003:12). As stated earlier, acquiring a language comes with many challenges but it is the overcoming of these difficulties which promotes critical and analytical thinking – a necessary skill for a hotel manager. This idea is supported by Embleton who states ‘language training is management training’ (cited in Dörnyei & Schmidt 2001:26).

Second language motivation research

In order to encourage students to dedicate time to studying a second language, educators must first identify the factors which motivate students as this is the key to successful learning. According to Dörnyei, (2001:183) ‘L2 (second language) motivation research is aimed at understanding the operation of motivational factors/processes in the learning of second languages as well as exploring ways to optimise student motivation’. Many studies have been carried out into the area of language motivation but perhaps the most referred to research is that of Gardner and Lambert (1972) who identified two types of motivation – integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. Integrative orientation applies to learners who have great interest in the language’s culture and so are driven by an internal desire to engage and

participate in social situations which arise either by visiting or moving to that country. Instrumental orientation is applied to learners who have a goal to achieve i.e. a job interview, passing an academic course etc... These learners are pushed by external factors into studying a subject they may otherwise have little interest in. According to Norris-Holt (2001) 'it has been found that generally students select instrumental reasons more frequently than integrative reasons for the study of language. Those who do support an integrative approach to language study are usually more highly motivated and overall more successful in language learning.' Therefore educators, when designing a syllabus, need to take into account that the majority of students are only there out of necessity rather than desire.

Teaching culture in the language classroom

So how can educators overcome these difficulties? First educators need to try and direct students towards integrative orientation. Some of the course work should focus on the culture of the language. There are several benefits to doing this. As mentioned early, 'language does not exist in a social vacuum' (Gibson, 1999:21) therefore to understand many linguistic features, some knowledge of the culture is required. An example of this which the author has come across in the language classroom is the use of idioms. An idiom is defined as an expression formed by a fixed group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced by looking at the individual words. For example to describe a situation which will never happen, in French, *quand les poules auront des dents* is used. However if a native English speaker is to translate this into English, its literal translation is *when hens have teeth*. The meaning may not be clear to a French language learner. This is a simplistic example but often in the acquisition of a language many culturally embedded expressions can pose some problems both in terms of comprehension and use. Further exploration into the area of language barriers created by culturally referenced expressions has been recently carried out in the Shannon College of Hotel Management by Year Four theses students D. Connolly and N. Murphy (2010). During their research they discovered that a problem which arose for all hospitality students regardless of country, hotel or department was the use of slang language. Slang language is very informal vocabulary and is 'used by members of particular social and professional groups' (Swan 1995:511). Without knowledge of the meanings of slang expressions, students can feel isolated from their

colleagues and disillusioned with their own language skills while on placement. From their research, Connolly and Murphy concluded that classes in the use of slang language are a prerequisite for pre-placement students.

Another reason to introduce students to the language's culture is to reduce the psychological distance between the learner and the target country. According to Schumann (cited in Coleman 1995:15) 'the social and psychological distance between the learner and the target community are key variables in the language acquisition process. Psychological distance encompasses language shock, the stress of culture shock, individual ego boundaries and motivation.' Therefore introducing placement students to the target culture may help reduce some nervous anticipation and in its place promote interest and overall motivation to learn. This idea is supported by Rogers who states '...we forget that initial motivation to learn may be weak and die; alternatively it can be increased and directed into new channels' (cited in Harmer 2002:52).

Student and teacher analysis

However educators need to remember that while students may have shifted towards integrative motivation, they are still fundamentally influenced by instrumental factors. Therefore at the beginning of each course a needs analysis should be administered and the information given should be analysed and promptly acted upon. A needs analysis is defined as an 'analysis to determine what students need to be able to do in the target language in their educational or professional situation' (Harmer, 2002:224). By conducting this analysis, the educator can quickly identify what topics to incorporate into their teaching thus providing the students with a class which interests them.

Apart from analysing students, educators need to also self-examine their teaching methodologies and assess if their chosen methodology suits the needs of their students. Much research has been carried out into defining the optimum methodology and numerous approaches such as the Audio-lingualism Approach, Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) have fallen in and out of favour with language teachers over the decades. While not advocating one teaching method over another, some consideration should be given to using some of the techniques encompassed in the

Communicative Approach. The Communicative Approach aims to provide students with realistic communicative tasks. The focus is not on accuracy but on the fluency of performing a task which can be understood by all parties involved in the linguistic exchange. Examples of activities employed by this approach to ‘replicate real communication’ (Harmer, 2002:85) are role-plays, problem solving, story writing, sharing information etc...The hospitality industry is heavily based in oral communication whether it is from welcoming a guest to asking maintenance to fix a tap, therefore it is vitally important that hospitality students studying languages at third level are exposed to authentic hospitality-based communicative situations in the classroom.

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to examine the forces which influence hospitality students’ motivation at 3rd level to acquire a new language and to establish a methodology to improve interest in language learning. According to Dörnyei second language motivation research ‘is aimed at understanding the operation of motivational factors in the learning of second languages as well as exploring ways to optimise student motivation’ (Dörnyei 2001:183).

For the purposes of the paper, the Shannon College of Hotel Management was chosen as the sampling area as the college can provide an insight into students’ perspective on language learning before and after working in their target language. Despite the fact that traditionally the quantitative approach is used for motivational analysis, the mix method approach was chosen instead as ‘there is clearly scope for a more qualitative approach to the study of language learning motivation, to complement this long-standing quantitative approach of research’ (Ushioda cited in Dörnyei & Schmidt 2001:95). While the quantitative method allows for the replication of reliable statistical data, it does not provide an opportunity for respondents to voice their opinion. Therefore a survey with both closed and open ended questions was used in order to determine motivation orientation (quantitative) as well as examining possible teaching strategies (qualitative). While open ended questions can either lead to numerous results or highlight a common trend, it allows respondents to give their opinion uninhibitedly on language teaching.

In order to administer the surveys, Google Documents was selected. Google Documents allows a researcher to create confidential online surveys where all statistical data is formulated into graphs and qualitative data can be easily read on spreadsheets. Another advantage of using this is that, surveys can be sent directly to respondents' email accounts with follow-up reminders to complete the survey thus yielding a higher response rate than paper surveys. The surveys for this paper were emailed directly to students' email accounts and two follow-up reminders were sent requesting the students to fill-in the surveys within 3 weeks. The response rate yielded was 44%.

Data Analysis

The survey results were divided into two categories – pre-placement and post placement. And the languages studied by the respondents break down into the following percentages:

	Pre-placement	Post-placement
English	51%	17%
French	38%	54%
German	6%	12%
Spanish	5%	17%

As stated earlier, it is important for educators to identify the type of motivation which influences their students' learning. From the survey, it is clearly evident that the majority of students are driven by instrumental motivational needs. 95% of pre-placement students stated that having a second language provides a wider range of job opportunities and 86% said they would choose to study the language if it were an optional subject in 1st Year with the majority citing that it would be beneficial to their future careers. When post-placement students were asked "*If you had the option of continuing or dropping your second language after Year 2 placement, what would you choose to do? Briefly explain your decision*" 83% of post-placement students said that they would continue to do it also stating that it would be an advantage to their future careers – an instrumental factor of motivation. 13% of pre-placement students

and 17% of post-placement students said they would not choose to continue with their language learning for the following reasons: a) not academically strong in the subject, and b) no intention to work in the target language. However, all students acknowledged having a second language is a valuable skill to boosting a career in the hospitality industry. Only a minority of all students (8% approx.) fell into the integrative motivation category.

Falling into the instrumental motivation category does not necessarily mean that students have little interest in learning. It simply means that language teachers have to be flexible to students' needs and adopt some new strategies. The following sections aim to examine students' attitudes towards language learning and propose practices which could be put in place to generate active learning.

Often a determining factor of student motivation is to examine the enjoyment rate of language learning. The survey showed that 84% of pre-placement students and 75% of post-placement students said they enjoy studying a language and it would appear that this is supported by their attendance records in language classes.

Rate your attendance:	Pre-placement	Post-placement
95-100%	63%	33.5%
90-100%	13%	12.5%
80-90%	2%	25%
70-80%	17%	17%
60-70%	0%	8%
50-60%	2%	4%
40-50%	2%	0%
Less than 40%	2%	0%

However closer inspection of the results show that 74.5% of all students, in both categories, who stated they have an attendance of over 90% attend English class. This highlights and supports Schumann's theory (cited in Coleman 1995:15) of decreasing

motivation to learn created by increasing distance from the target culture. The non-English language students feel far removed from their target culture and so are less motivated to attend class. This speculation is compounded by the fact that some non-English language students suggested visiting their target culture during 1st Year in order ‘to have more drive to learn’ (anonymous student). While this is logistically unfeasible for the institute it does show that students feel disconnected from their target culture.

The teaching of culture is an important pedagogical tool. When asked if culture should be taught in the classroom, 78% of pre-placement students felt this was necessary. Further analysis of the open-ended question *what could be done to increase your interest in studying your second language* many pre-placement students replied that they would like opportunities to learn more about the culture of their target language. Over a third of post-placement students also commented on the teaching of culture under this question with one student citing ‘I think an in-depth awareness of certain cultures and mannerisms of each placement country should be taught specifically when a student has been placed. I think there should be an option of learning about the cultural aspects of each country.’ Methods suggested by students to aid in the teaching of culture were: a) watching TV programmes and films from the target language in class, b) reading some materials which do not solely focus on the hospitality industry but on other aspects of life in the target culture, c) where possible, try to set-up sessions with native speakers, and d) arranging some classes in the use of slang language. If educators integrate these suggestions into the curriculum, they not only help students develop a cultural awareness of the target language but also create valuable opportunities for students to develop their receptive and production skills by using materials which are relevant to students’ needs and thus generating interest.

Teaching culture was not the only potential motivational factor mentioned by students. Focusing more on oral production also featured very high in the results. Students on some of the language courses feel there is too much of a focus on written production – a skill which is not required during 2nd year placement. Students feel it would be more beneficial to focus more on speaking and listening. 75% of post-placement students stressed that speaking and listening are the main skills required for a successful placement. According to the survey, students feel that they are not given

much opportunity to practice impromptu speech. Possible ways of including impromptu speech in the classroom are through role plays, debates and open class discussions. The students were quite negative about prepared speaking tasks i.e. oral exercises assigned for homework and then recited in class. They feel that this technique is somewhat redundant as it does not offer the dynamism of conversations which arise in the workplace or in everyday life. It is therefore important that educators in the hospitality area offer students communicative tasks based on authentic situations which they may find themselves in – and to achieve this educators need to look at the Communicative Approach.

A further criticism made by the students was the amount of time spent on teaching grammar. Many students find grammar classes tedious and so tend to be demotivated. Unfortunately grammar cannot be ignored as it provides the building blocks needed to construct communication. Under the Communicative Approach, grammar does not always have to be accurate – the purpose is to communicate fluently. A way of balancing accuracy with fluency is to look at integrating grammar games into the classroom. Grammar games provide students with controlled practice of a grammar point but with a fun or competitive element attached – both proven to be effective motivators. There are many books on the language market such as *Games for Grammar Practice* by M. Zaorob and E. Chin and *Grammar Games* by Mario Rinvolucri – a well known contributor to the teaching of the English language. This idea is further supported by suggestions made by numerous students to have grammar games employed in the classroom instead of mundane fill-in the gap exercises.

A hypothesis put forward by the survey was to assess student interest in using self-access centres. Self-access centres offer students a wide range of materials in their target language such as films, music, books and magazines which they can borrow and use during their free time. The survey showed that 66% of pre-placement and 58% of post-placement students said they would be interested in using one. Even though the numbers show that approximately only half of the students in both categories would use a self-access centre, it would nonetheless be beneficial for institutes teaching hospitality to primarily invest in a small scale self-access centre with future plans to expand in accordance with student interest. Being “neither agree nor disagree” accounted for the other cohort of students. Perhaps this uncertainty is an

indication of students' misapprehension as to the purpose and benefit of a self-access centre. A simple guided tour of the facility at the beginning of Year One and encouragement from language teachers to avail of the materials would help remedy this.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to identify the motivational forces which drive hospitality students to acquire a language and to use the information generated from the research to propose a methodology to stimulate student learning. By having linguistically competent students entering into the hospitality industry, the commercial value of languages becomes evident as these graduate students can target foreign markets for new business as well as work with staff and guests from different linguistic backgrounds.

The results from the research carried out have shown that the majority of hospitality students acquiring a second language at third level tend to be driven by instrumental motivation – a term which is applied to learners who wish to succeed in language acquisition for professional or academic purposes. While this motivation, in theory, does not yield the highest grades, it can be deduced from the survey results that these students are nevertheless interested in learning. Often language courses are designed with integrative motivation goals in mind, and instrumentally motivated students become frustrated as their needs are not being met. Language lecturers need to evaluate the relevancy of their teaching methodology and establish if it caters for instrumentally motivated students. Factors to consider are: a) integrating some elements of the Communicative Approach into the curriculum for the teaching of grammar and for the provision of authentic communicative tasks, b) the integration of culturally relevant materials, and c) increased oral production.

Implications for future research

The research conducted at the Shannon College of Hotel Management was the first of its kind at that institute and therefore there is vast scope for further quantitative and qualitative research. Setting up of student focus groups, tracking and recording

changes in motivation as students progress on their degree programme as well as interviewing language lecturers could yield more insight into language motivation. It must be noted, at this point, that languages are a compulsory subject at the Shannon College of Hotel Management and it may be beneficial to carry out a similar survey at an institute where languages are optional to examine if the same or similar results are yielded.

Another area for future research and development is in the area of classroom materials. One of the outcomes of the research was the need for more authentic hospitality-based activities. While there are many hospitality books on the language market, perhaps the most effective way for lecturers to design classroom materials is through analysis of the CLAS (Cambridge, Limerick and Shannon) Corpus. This corpus is a collaborative project between the University of Cambridge, Mary Immaculate College, and Shannon College of Hotel Management and consists of over a hundred hours of recorded materials from classes held in the Shannon College. One of the many purposes of the corpus is to aid in the design of classroom materials for the hospitality industry.

If educators adopt the pedagogical strategies and develop classroom materials as suggested by the research, they may notice higher participation and ultimately higher results from more motivated students.

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