

Motivating speaking in the world language classroom and beyond

Samantha Fowler, *Northwest High School (MD)*

Abstract

Target language speaking competence is a skill both students and world language teachers desire to develop, yet it is often one of the weakest areas observed in secondary classrooms (Thompson & Mutton, 2022). To help improve student willingness to speak, educators should understand what intrinsically and extrinsically motivates learners. The proceeding literature review explores how studies on second language speaking motivation can inform instructional practices that foster student interpersonal skills. Pedagogy that empowers students to exercise control over their learning seems to motivate student speech. For example, providing choices in speaking topics, having readily accessible speaking scaffolds or resources, and guiding students through metacognitive tasks are methods instructors across disciplines can integrate that engage students in discourse. These student-centered strategies may cognitively prepare students to speak because they have opportunities to discuss familiar topics, practice, and receive feedback, which could reduce anxiety and increase speech fluency.

Keywords: classroom instruction, curriculum design

Introduction

Despite the importance of speaking competence in natural social interaction, there are many elements that affect world language students' willingness and ability to speak in the target language. Immersing oneself in the language of another culture can be intimidating, especially learning to recognize and orally produce new phonemes of a second language (L2). Authentic interpersonal communication requires an individual to listen and respond to questions and comments from others. Individual perceived competence, language anxiety, motivation, age, and gender seem to impact one's ability to communicate (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003). A person's motivation, defined as goal-directed behavior, may lead them to exert more effort and persistence to achieve objectives in the face of challenges than an unmotivated individual (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003, p. 173). Consequently, world language educators should explore the scholarly work on speaking motivation if their goal is

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to prepare students to use language effectively in various contexts. The following literature review presents recent findings in the learning sciences concerning student motivation to communicate in a world language, and then examines how this research can inform pedagogical strategies to potentially increase student discourse in common and less commonly taught languages in the United States, as well as other disciplines. Since there is limited current research on motivating L2 speaking in American classrooms, the research presented also includes applications from studies conducted in a variety of countries and languages.

Motivation and Second Language Oral Communication

This first section explores intrinsic and extrinsic components that influence a person's motivation to speak when learning another language. To begin, motivation impacts a learner's ability to produce language in the world language classroom. In a meta-analysis of 75 independent samples conducted by Masgoret and Gardner (2003), researchers found that there is a higher correlation between motivation and second language achievement than learning situation, integrativeness (how open an individual is to identifying with a different language community), integrative orientation (how interested a person is in interacting with a different language community), or instructional orientation. Therefore, educators should understand how internal and external motivational factors work to positively increase student outcomes.

Intrinsic Motivational Factors

Self-determination theory offers insight into how humans are motivated by an inherent inner need for self-growth. This desire stems from the psychological need to feel competent, independent, and connected as they manage their personal well-being throughout their lives (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Viewing intrinsic motivation for communicating in an L2 from the self-determination perspective, a motivated student could be interested in learning the linguistic elements of the language itself and interacting with other speakers of the language (Łockiewicz, 2019). Someone who is intrinsically motivated may feel prepared to speak and take pleasure in communicating, whether or not they have the knowledge to effectively use the other language. Researchers have considered learner motivation connected to what is called the process model and the motivational self-system. The process model argues that a student's motivation changes at different learning stages, from goal-setting at the start of the lesson to reflecting at the end, depending on feedback from their environment. The motivational self system is related to a person's drive to achieve a desired future multilingual self (Goodridge, 2017). Thus, intrinsic motivation can affect self-identity as someone works towards who they want to become. Goodridge (2017) also suggested future research to examine if this desire to work towards the ideal L2 self could possibly be related to someone's motivation to be integrated in another cultural group or even teacher motivation, the educator's desire to teach and self-efficacy that they can effectively teach.

There are several internal factors that contribute to a person's willingness to communicate (WTC). Nematizadeh and Wood (2019) conducted a study that measured the WTC of four Canadian university students whose first language was Farsi and L2 was English. The researchers gave participants, who were aged 30-35, a picture task with questions in which they had one minute to plan and then two minutes to record a video response. Immediately after their speech was recorded, participants reviewed their video and rated their WTC at each part, and then verbally explained in Farsi why they rated certain moments with higher or lower WTC. The data analysis revealed WTC shifted based on several cognitive considerations: student perception of their speech fluency, self-monitoring, and vocabulary retrieval. Participants' cognitive load increased when they perceived dysfluency, worried

about grammatical accuracy, and struggled with word retrieval, resulting in lower WTC. Based on these findings, interventions to support student speech should build learner confidence with vocabulary and familiar topics of conversation to decrease cognitive load and hopefully augment speech fluency. Moreover, another study (Pyun, Kim, Cho, & Lee, 2014) found that risk-taking—the willingness of a learner to try and improve their use of a novel linguistic structure—correlated with a student's oral performance. The scholars analyzed questionnaire responses from 104 First-Year Korean students whose first language is English at an American public university, and discovered learners who engaged in risk-taking behavior, such as not hesitating to use new communicative structures, were more likely to actively speak in the L2. Pyun and colleagues suggested these risk-takers spoke in the target language more because the constant practice helped them recognize their oral challenges and then use the feedback in future attempts, developing speech proficiency.

Extrinsic Motivational Factors

Furthermore, environmental factors interact with internal factors to affect an individual's motivation to speak a world language. When a student is extrinsically motivated, they may rely on the guidance of mentors in their immediate community to encourage them, and even see L2 learning as a path to meet a school requirement or future professional goal (Łockiewicz, 2019). According to Syed and colleagues (Syed, Memon, Chacar, Zameer, & Shah, 2021), scholars continue to explore how learner agency, or how a person creates their own optimal learning conditions, determines one's motivation to use the 2. In other words, a student's L2 development and WTC changes during the duration of a lesson due to continuous variations in individual cognitive factors and the learning environment. For example, learners assess surrounding resources and then determine if they want to use the language or wait for a more comfortable time to join the conversation. MacIntyre et al. (2003) conducted a study at a public junior high school in Nova Scotia, Canada, where English and French are the co-national languages. Although English is the primary language in Nova Scotia, students can enroll in French as a First Language Program, or one of several French as Second Language programs. Students are required to take Core French from grade 4-9 and have the option to enroll in a French immersion program either in primary school or in grade 7. If available in their community, a student can elect to take Mi'kmaq or Gaelic to replace the French requirement (Government of Nova Scotia). The scholars found in a study of 268 Canadian French immersion students, aged 11-16 and across grades 7, 8, and 9, that the older students were more willing to communicate, felt more competent, and communicated more in the L2 than the younger students, but there was a decrease in L2 motivation from grades 7 to 8. Moreover, females reported an increase in WTC and reduction in anxiety from grades 8 to 9, while males' WTC and anxiety was constant across the three grades. Researchers speculated these differences could be the result of both human development—such as that females might overall feel less self-conscious in later adolescence because they entered puberty earlier—as well as language teachers treating girls more favorably. Nonetheless, the researchers did not consider how student gender identity, socioeconomic status, or Nova Scotia public school regulations could have impacted their results. Future studies should investigate the extent to which these factors might affect learner WTC in the classroom. The complex relationship between internal and environmental factors suggests educators should implement strategies that create a supportive environment if they want to increase student motivation to speak the target language. Building on this scholarly analysis of speaking motivation, the next section examines pedagogy that could motivate learners and considers how educators could enhance the teaching of metacognition.

Pedagogical Strategies and Willingness to Communicate

Strategies to Support Intrinsic Motivation

Based on classroom motivation research, teachers can alter their pedagogy to optimize student desire to communicate in the world language. Since student self-perceived competence in L2 is related to speech fluency and motivation, learners need to experience success speaking. In a study by Bernales (2016), the researcher conducted a study involving 16 third semester German students at a research university in the Midwest. The data from surveys given to the entire class, observations, and interviews with four students, aged 18-21, found that habituation to specific speaking tasks promoted student confidence and use of the target language. For example, the students emphasized the speaking task that their professor had them do at the start of each class—where students spoke with classmates and the teacher in German for ten minutes about any topic they wanted—contributed to their increased confidence in their L2 abilities. Bernales reasoned that because the students became accustomed to an activity that had established L2 use norms, they developed the L2 oral skills necessary to participate and grew comfortable communicating in German on topics that interested them. Moreover, the activity served to build positive relationships with peers and the professor. The results also supported the theory that students' L2 motivation can be connected to the realization of several factors: their ideal L2 selves (the person someone wants to become by learning L2 and using this desire as a self-guide), ought-to L2 selves based on teacher expectations (the characteristics someone thinks they need to have to avoid negative consequences), and immediate learning environment (Dörnyei, 2005). For instance, Bernales found during the student interviews that motivated individuals developed confidence in using German and seeing themselves as a proficient L2 speaker because of the course's strategies. The interconnectedness of identity and environment means educators could motivate L2 oral production by setting clear expectations when to use L2 and providing structures, such as sentence starters and well-known content, to scaffold speaking tasks. During a unit where the objective is for learners to use different forms of the past tense, students could engage in speed-dating activities where they ask classmates about their childhood activities and present slides or a poster about what they used to do when they were younger in small groups. Students should use graphic organizers to record their peers' responses and draft their speeches to feel prepared.

Strategies to Support Extrinsic Motivation

Scholars continue to examine how teachers can design a classroom environment conducive to engaging students in speech. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) had 200 English teachers in Hungary rate the perceived importance and the frequency with which they use a variety of motivational strategies. The top three strategies based on rank order were: teacher motivation that models effective effort and acceptance, positive classroom climate, and clear task presentation. The educators recognized how teacher preparedness and ability to ensure a nonjudgmental environment can foster a safe space where students feel comfortable making mistakes and practicing a non-native language. In addition, Christie's (2016) study of two French classes of 31 and 12 students, aged 11-16, in a secondary school in London also revealed techniques that maximize oral production. Target language management where the instructor rewards L2 use, incorporates visuals to accompany written language, and provides resources that help students ask for needed words can lead to more spontaneous L2 use. The scholar also argued that competition and student-directed activities facilitated spoken language. For instance, the current author has transformed familiar games with speaking scaffolds, such as Guess Who to practice descriptions, Battleship to support using

verb conjugations, and the Price is Right to engage students with comparison adjectives. Through student-centered instruction, learners might be more willing to speak because they have opportunities to collaborate with peers and develop confidence to ask for classmate or instructor assistance when they are unsure how to approach an oral prompt.

Strategies To Support Metacognition

Furthermore, improving student use of metacognitive strategies may support target language use. Forbes and Fisher (2015) conducted an action research study with five students, aged 16-17, enrolled in Advanced Level French at a secondary school in England who struggled with speaking the language. As an intervention, the researchers taught students to recognize strategies to prepare, monitor, and evaluate their speaking during tasks. The results indicated that increased awareness and use of metacognitive strategies did augment student confidence, perception, and proficiency of their oral abilities. Teaching students to employ metacognitive strategies, such as organizing ideas before speaking, self-correcting, reflecting, using feedback, and how to change strategies for different tasks can positively impact student confidence and speech proficiency. After students participate in a speaking task, the current author requires that learners rate how useful the activity was to practice speaking, explain why it was useful or not useful, and elaborate about steps they need to take to improve their speaking. The goal of this metacognitive strategy is to activate student background knowledge and reflection skills to make discourse memorable. In addition, Thompson and Mutton (2022) did a study with 148 pupils, aged 11-15, investigating how classroom-based intervention could change attitudes towards speaking French at an all-boys secondary school in England. Instructing learners to use a variety of memory, cognitive, communicative, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies did lead to more positive attitudes and improved self-efficacy about speaking. After practicing the strategies, pupils received a “Strategy Island Map” handout for future speaking activities to facilitate self-monitoring of their before-, during-, and after-speaking strategies (p. 6-7). The results support prior findings that engaging students in self-reflection and providing multiple structures for oral communication can improve L2 speaking confidence. Moreover, Gilead (2019) highlighted the importance of allowing learners to engage in what Vygotsky (1934/1987) calls inner and private speech as a tool in language development. Gilead found in a study of 10 Modern Hebrew beginner students at a major Australian university that even though learners may not be vocal during a whole-class discussion, they may be actively and silently utilizing L2 for their personal use. Gilead recommended educators realize how inner and private speech helps students prepare public speech for partner and small group work, and require students to not only self-reflect on the strategies they used, but also share with their classmates. The subsequent section proposes potential applications of these speech interventions in other disciplines.

Implications

The pedagogical techniques that could increase student WTC in a world language may also have positive effects on student discourse in general secondary courses as well. Bower (2019) analyzed data from three different English secondary schools concerning how the pedagogical approach of content and language integrated learning (learning a content subject in a non-native language) affected pupil motivation. The researcher highlighted how stimulating content, providing the needed scaffolds to make content accessible, and developing tasks where students could expect success contributed to student motivation. The integration of relevant content increased student enjoyment of learning and speaking in the target language because the pupils understood how to use the target language in

real world contexts and felt pride in their achievements. When teachers make connections between the curriculum and relevant student experiences, students seem to be more confident and willing to discuss their perspectives in class. Non-language teachers who want to increase on-task student discourse could consider implementing projects or other tasks that guide students through how content experts approach a problem with scaffolds like check-ins and curated research appropriate for their reading level.

Other methods of student-centered pedagogy may foster student WTC across disciplines. Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, and Abdi (2014) collected interview data from adolescent male English learners in Iran about how various instructional techniques shifted their situational WTC, and discovered how providing flexibility in conversation topics and small group work tends to increase student participation. When learners take charge of their learning, such as determining what they want to discuss or how to approach solving a problem with a group, they develop confidence to share their viewpoint and knowledge. Similar to Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) findings, Zarrinabadi et al. emphasized how a relaxed classroom atmosphere promotes opportunities for student speech because learners feel accepted and know how to reduce their anxiety. Students should recognize that making errors is part of the learning process, and educators can provide feedback in a way that makes students less anxious. For example, Zarrinabadi et al. recommended teachers use delayed corrective feedback so a student does not feel singled out for correction and direct questions to the class to answer before giving a definitive answer. These tactics could motivate students in any subject to speak during class because they might feel less anxious and recognize their contributions to discussion are valued.

Conclusions

Motivation affects student speech production and attitudes towards coursework. As MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) note, student hesitation in an L2 highly correlates with their perceived communication competence, WTC, and language anxiety, and can be self-reinforcing and cause avoidance. They further explain that learners with positive attitudes towards French are more likely to continue with the language. Consequently, World Language Departments in secondary schools concerned about maintaining enrollment in higher levels beyond state-mandated language requirements should consider how to encourage students to appreciate the challenge of learning another language. To improve student engagement with discourse, educators should ensure learners experience success. Student-centered instructional strategies, such as working in partners or small groups, language scaffolds, as well as tasks which prepare students for conversation in realistic situations can promote a classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking intellectual risks and sharing their knowledge. Furthermore, building student metacognitive skills can help develop their ability to self-reflect and take ownership of their learning. These practices can also apply to other disciplines to foster deeper connections with not only content, but also interactions with others.

Future studies should further explore the ways in which motivation, communication, and identity development intersect. Researchers can design studies to understand the extent to which the desire for peer acceptance and identity exploration during adolescence affects student speech in secondary schools. While studies found adolescent motivation to learn and speak a world language may change as they age, there is less definitive research concerning why this shift occurs. Scholars should investigate why and how the interaction

between internal and external motivational factors shifts a learner's WTC in a classroom. By recognizing the causes of motivational changes throughout a lesson, a teacher can utilize strategies that maximize student opportunities for meaningful and authentic discourse.

In summary, current motivation and WTC research can inform pedagogy to support student interpersonal communication, especially in novice world language classrooms. Educators should create an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable sharing their viewpoints and making mistakes. To achieve this, teachers should incorporate intriguing conversational topics in which students have prior knowledge. As educators design and implement speaking interventions, they should also incorporate chances for students to collaborate and provide differentiated scaffolds depending on their communication level. Adolescent learners will be more likely to speak if they feel their classmates and instructor will not judge them for mispronunciation or grammatical errors, and therefore educators can model how to use and give constructive feedback that allows an individual to grow their oral skills. Perhaps most importantly, students will have a deeper understanding of why certain strategies help their ability to converse when given the chance to self-reflect. Engagement in metacognition empowers pupils to connect their behavior with their learning, teaching them how to approach future problems.

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Samantha Fowler (M.Ed. University of Maryland) is an AP U.S. Government and Politics and French teacher. She is a mentor for the Project Citizen program and co-sponsor of the National Honor Society at Northwest High School. Samantha attended the University of Maryland, College Park, earning a M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction and a B.A. in History and French Language and Literature. She completed the Graduate Certificate in Mind, Brain, and Teaching from Johns Hopkins University in May 2022.
