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Temporal fluctuations in foreign language motivation: Results of a longitudinal study

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ABSTRACT

According to Ellis (2008), motivation has received a lot of interest in language learning. It is unfortunate, however, that little attention has been paid to the dynamic nature of the construct, particularly changes in motivation within single classes and series of lessons. The study whose results are reported in this paper aims at investigating the dynamic character of foreign language motivation both within single lessons and sequences of classes over the period of several months. The participants were 52 senior high school learners. The study encompassed 121 naturally occurring English lessons. The data were gathered by means of a background questionnaire, motivational grids, observations and teacher's notes as well as individual interviews and lesson plans. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results of the study demonstrate that language learning motivation changes not only during a single class but also from one lesson to the next. Factors responsible for such variations included lessons, learners and school.

Keywords: foreign/second language motivation; changes in motivation; interest and involvement

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Introduction

As Brown (2007) claims, motivation is “the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task, motivation is a star player in the cast of characters assigned to second language learning scenarios around the world” (p. 168). This claim is fully justifiable in view of the fact that without motivation success in learning a foreign/second language would be difficult to achieve. Beyond doubt, studying a foreign/second language requires a lot of effort and commitment on the part of language learners and teachers because it is a long process which can take years or even decades. It has to be remembered, however, that neither a perfect teacher nor modern methods can ever ensure that students will make progress in the target language without being committed and interested enough in studying it.

For a long time, the literature in the field has viewed motivation as a stable attribute of students which does not alter or evolve with time (Murphy & Alexander, 2000). It should be noted, however, that lately a process-oriented view of motivation has materialized which recognizes its dynamic character (Dörnyei, 2001, 2005). According to Dörnyei (2001, 2003), this temporal aspect of motivation is of particular significance in a domain such as language learning. This is because students are inclined to manifest changes in motivation to learn the target language even during a single class as well as they demonstrate fluctuations in their motivation to do it over a longer period of time. It should also be said that the dynamic dimension of motivation can be described by dynamic systems theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) for the reason that students’ motives, effort and engagement are characterized by continuous changes related to the impact of internal and external factors, which are intricately interconnected and are themselves subject to substantial variations.

It has to be stressed, however, that there are only a few empirical studies which aimed at investigating this dynamic part of the construct. The study reported in this paper, which, on the one hand, was motivated by this scant body of research, and, on the other, by the studies carried out by Pawlak (2012), Kruk (2013) and Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Bielak (2014), attempted to explore the dynamic character of motivation both within single lessons and sequences of successive classes over the period of one semester.

Literature Review

For decades, motivation has been regarded by researchers and practitioners alike to be an important part of foreign or second language instruction and has still been researched extensively (e.g. Vahtrick & de Bot, 2013; Rahimi & Karkami, 2015). Motivation has been defined as the “desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction, and satisfaction with the task” (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993, p. 3), “the effort learners put into learning an L2 as a result of their desire or need to learn it” (Ellis, 1997, p. 141) or as a dynamic construct and a function of learners’ thinking process:

In a general sense, motivation can be defined as the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 65).

According to Ellis (2008), the recognition of the dynamic aspect of motivation is one of the major developments in the study of second and foreign language learning. The temporal aspect of motivation has been acknowledged in a number of theoretical proposals concentrating on the impact of this variable on the process of learning foreign/second languages. For example, Williams

and Burden (1997) differentiated three motivational stages: (1) “reasons for doing something”, (2) “deciding to do something”, and (3) “sustaining the effort or persisting”. In a similar vein, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) and Dörnyei (2001, 2003), proposed a model of learning motivation for the foreign/second language classroom with three discrete processes: (1) preactional stage, (2) actional stage and (3) postactional stage. As regards the first stage, it refers to generating motivation or “choice motivation” where language learners select their goals or tasks to be followed. As for the actional stage, it involves “executive motivation” in which the generated motivation has to be actively sustained and protected. With regard to the last stage, i.e. postactional stage, it is called “motivational retrospection” and involves learners’ retrospective evaluation of how they studied. Accordingly, what learners do in this phase will determine the type of activities they might be motivated to perform. According to Ellis (2008), the model is able to integrate other models of motivation and it is capable of explaining how learning motivation alters over time which, in turn, makes it also superior to the static models of motivation.

Several empirical investigations into the dynamics of language learning motivation have been reported in the literature. Some of these studies investigated the changes in language learning motivation over the period of several weeks or months (e.g. Ushioda, 2001; Shoib & Dörnyei, 2005; Hsieh, 2009; Kim, 2009; Nitta & Asano, 2010; Piniel & Csizér, 2015). Of particular interest to the present study, however, are research projects undertaken with an eye to investigate the changes in motivational intensity during the course of learning events, i.e. single language lessons or a sequences of such classes. One such study is Egbert’s (2003) investigation of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in the context of second language learning and among Spanish university students who performed a number of learning tasks. Egbert was able to identify a number of conditions likely to stimulate such a state (e.g. a perceived equilibrium between skills and challenges, opportunities for increased concentration or an absence of self-consciousness).

A research project that deals specifically with temporal variation of motivation in language learning in the course of single classes and a series of such lessons was carried out by Pawlak (2012). The study investigated the changes in the motivation of 28 senior high school learners, both in terms of their goals and intentions, as well as their interest and engagement in classroom activities and tasks over the period of four weeks. The analysis of the data gathered by means of questionnaires, observations and semi-structured interviews with randomly selected students demonstrated that although the subjects’ motives for learning English remained rather stable, the motivational intensity fluctuated on a minute-to-minute basis. It has to be noted, however, that the study was unsuccessful in detecting meaningful changes in motivational intensity from one English lesson to the next. In addition, the complex and sometimes inconsistent patterns that emerged from the data prevented the researcher from drawing straightforward conclusions concerning the factors accountable for the changes in motivation.

In a follow-up study, Pawlak et al. (2014) set out to explore motivational evolution in 38 senior high school learners of English. The researchers investigated the subjects’ reasons for learning English and their longer-term involvement and engagement in four lessons over the period of two weeks. Similar to the research project just discussed, this study utilized a comparable set of data collection instruments which comprised detailed lesson plans, interviews with randomly chosen students, motivation grids completed by the participants at five-minute intervals during each English lesson and teachers’ and learners’ evaluations of the conducted classes. The analysis of the data revealed that, in the long-term perspective, the changes in motivation were related to instrumentality (i.e. pursuing pragmatic goals and avoiding adverse consequences) with the caveat that the detected fluctuations were recognized only by a few students. As regards the changes in motivational intensity identified during single lessons as well as from one class to the next (i.e. the short-term changes), they were found to be dependent on the lesson’s focus, the type of activities the students were asked to perform, their duration, the transition from one phase of the class to

the next, cooperation with other students as well as the significance of the issues covered and their connection with the final examinations. In view of the fact that individual students showed more or less interest while performing various tasks and the level of motivation identified in the three groups sometimes deviated for the same activities, Pawlak et al. acknowledge that a host of other variables (e.g. individual differences, group dynamics or internal and external influences) might have also had a role to play.

Yet in another study, Kruk (2013) examined the impact of internet resources and a browser-based virtual world on the subjects' motivation and its changing nature over a three-week period. The study comprised 13 third-grade students of a Polish senior high school. The data were collected by a variety of tools: a background questionnaire, interest grids, overall assessment of lessons questionnaire, an evaluation sheet and learners' logs. The analysis of the data showed that the intensity of motivation tended to change over time (i.e. both during single lessons and from one lesson to the next). It is interesting to note, however, that the students showed more interest and engagement while performing online activities and that the fluctuations in the level of motivation were less pronounced. Conversely, when asked to do the coursebook activities (i.e. the paper-based ones) their level of motivation proved to be more susceptible to changes. As Kruk concludes, the observed fluctuations in motivational intensity could be the direct result of the treatment employed and the activities the participants were requested to perform.

Although the research projects just discussed (i.e. the studies carried out by Pawlak, 2012; Kruk, 2013 and Pawlak et al., 2014) provide some insights into the changing nature of language learning motivation, they were all cross-sectional in design. Since, as Pawlak (2012, p. 274) rightly points out, "research into temporal aspects of motivation is an arduous task in view of the fact that it has to be longitudinal", the present paper reports the findings of a longitudinal study into the dynamic nature of language learning motivation with respect to how students' effort and involvement changes in the course of single language lessons and sequences of such classes. More precisely, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do levels of motivation change in the course of single lessons?
2. Do levels of motivation change from one lesson to another over the course of a semester?
3. What causes these changes in motivation?

Method

Participants

The participants were 52 senior high school learners (5 females and 47 males). At the time the study was conducted, the students were attending the second, third and fourth grades and they had just entered into a new semester, which means that the students had received at least one, two and three years of English instruction in the senior high school, respectively. The subjects, in accordance with the policy of the school, were divided into four groups for the purpose of learning English. Group 1 (the second grade) consisted of 20 students (2 females and 18 males), Group 2 and Group 3 (the third grade) comprised 11 (2 females and 8 males) and 10 learners (1 female and 9 males), respectively. As for Group 4 (the fourth grade), there were 11 male students. The second grade students were 17 years old, the third grade learners were 18 and the fourth grade ones were 19 years old. The participants' command of the English language was rather poor as evidenced by the mean semester grade in English: 2.55 (Group 1), 2.18 (Group 2), 3.20 (Group 3) and 2.64 (Group 4) on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). The subjects' self-assessment of their motivation for learning

English was quite high in the case of Groups 1, 2 and 3 since it amounted to 4.40, 4.00 and 4.10, respectively, on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). As for the learners in Group 4, their self-assessment of their motivation was lower and equaled 3.64. In addition, the majority of the students in Groups 1 and 2 pointed to the need to learn English in order to get a job in the future and they claimed that they had to study it, because it was a mandatory subject and they wanted to be promoted to the next class. As regards the students in Group 3, their main motivation for learning English was the prospect of successfully passing their school-leaving examinations in the future and getting a good job. The majority of the students in Group 4 wanted to learn English in order to pass their school-leaving examinations. Finally, it has to be noted that all the participants had two English lessons per week.

Procedures and Data Collection

The study was conducted over the period of one semester and it comprised 121 naturally occurring English lessons. In more specific terms, there were 30 lessons in Group 1, 26 in Group 2, 31 in Group 3 and 34 lessons in Group 4. All the subjects were taught by the present author who was their regular English teacher. The second and the third grade students were taught by means of the coursebook *New Horizons 2* (Group 1) and *New Horizons 3* (Groups 2 and 3) by Paul Raudley, Daniela Simons and Malgorzata Wieruszewska. The lessons in Group 4 were based on successive units from the coursebook *Longman Repetytorium Maturalne* by Marta Umińska, Bob Hastings, Dominika Chandler and Hanna Mrozowska. In addition, some of the activities were performed by the learners online. This was possible since all the classes were conducted in the language classroom equipped with laptop computers and the broadband connection to the Internet. A typical lesson commenced with checking a homework assignment and a short revision of the material covered before. Next, the teacher presented and discussed a new topic. After that, the students practiced the new material by means of a set of language activities. At the end of the class, the teacher summed up the most important points of the lesson and set a new homework assignment.

When it comes to the data collection instruments used in the course of the present study, they included a *background questionnaire*, *motivational grids*, *observations and teacher's notes* as well as *individual interviews* and *lesson plans*. The background questionnaire was filled out by the subjects at the beginning of the study and its main purpose was to obtain insights into the subjects' learning history and their motivation for learning the target language. With regard to the motivational grid, it aimed at measuring the learners' level of interest and involvement. The students were asked to self-rate their motivation every five minutes (i.e. seven times) on a scale ranging from 1 ('*I am not engaged and interested in activities at all*') to 7 ('*I am engaged and interested in activities completely*'). The tool was a modified version of a grid used by Pawlak (2012). As regards the observations and teacher's notes, they provided descriptions of the subjects' behaviors without unduly affecting the events in which the subjects were engaged. As for the individual interviews, they were conducted three times (i.e. at the beginning of the study, in the middle and at the end of it) with 18 randomly selected students from the four groups. The interviews aimed at identifying factors accountable for changes in motivation (sample questions: *What do you think of the previously conducted lessons?*, *Which components of the English lesson (i.e. activities, content, phase) do you consider as the most motivating?*, *Which components of the English classes do you regard as the least interesting and involving?*). The interviews were conducted in Polish by the teacher and they were audio-recorded. Finally, the lesson plans provided information related to lessons, their stages and tasks performed by the participants of the study.

As a final point it should be noted that in order to protect the study participants' identity, no real names are used in the paper when reporting the results and the research instruments used in the study were signed by the subjects with the date of birth instead of a name.

Analysis

The data collected by means of the background questionnaire, motivational grids, observations and teacher's notes as well as individual interviews and lesson plans were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis involved determining the means for motivational intensity in motivational grids for each of the seven times in a class the subjects in all four groups were asked to show their level of interest and involvement as well as computing the means for the items in the background questionnaire. Whenever deemed necessary, the statistical significance of the differences in the means was established by means of paired-samples *t* test. The significance value was set at $p < .05$ for all analyses. The qualitative analysis involved: (1) identifying the recurring items or themes in the data obtained from the individual interviews, observations and teacher's notes with special emphasis being put on the changes in the interest and involvement in the classes plus the factors to which such variations could be attributed and (2) linking fluctuations in motivation with regard to the phases of the classes and activities performed by the study participants.

Results and Discussion

Minute-to-Minute Changes in the Levels of Motivation

Figure 1 graphically represents a general pattern of fluctuations in the intensity of students' motivation in all four groups as measured by means of the motivational grid filled out by the subjects at five-minute intervals during the 121 lessons. Even a cursory look at Figure 1 shows that the levels of motivation in the four groups were quite high and oscillated between the value of 4.86 and 3.89 and the motivational intensity in the four groups was rather small. Nevertheless, some changes occurred and some patterns can be observed. One of them is related to the fact that the members of Groups 1, 2 and 3 were generally the least interested and involved in the first ten minutes of the classes. Another pattern can be found in the drop of motivation in Groups 1 and 2 in the middle of the lessons (minute 25) and at the end of the classes in Groups 1, 3 and 4. The students in Group 1, 2 and 4 demonstrated the increase in the level of motivation in minute 15; however, the learners in Group 3 declared more interest and involvement a bit later, i.e. in minute 25. It is also interesting to note that in Groups 1, 2 and 3, the subjects' motivation never fell below its initial levels. A somewhat different pattern can only be observed in Group 4 whose level of motivation was the highest in the first 15 minutes of the lessons and then it kept decreasing till the last minutes of the classes and was ultimately lower than in the beginning.

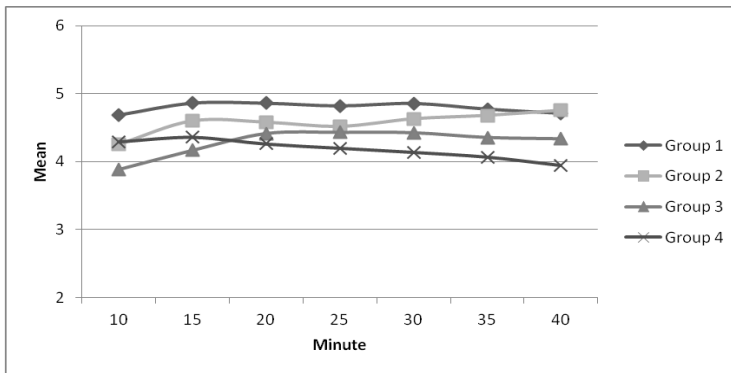


Figure 1. Changes in Motivational Intensity in the Four Groups during all Lessons

A paired-samples *t*-test revealed some statistically significant differences between different time periods in all four groups:

- Group 1: min. 10-15: $t(29) = -2.731, p = 0.011$; min.10-20: $t(29) = -2.485, p = 0.019$; min.10-30: $t(29) = -2.489, p = 0.019$; min.20-40: $t(29) = 2.249, p = 0.032$; min.30-35: $t(29) = 2.086, p = 0.046$; min.30-40: $t(29) = 2.548, p = 0.016$.
- Group 2: min.10-15: $t(25) = -2.604, p = 0.015$; min.10-20: $t(25) = -2.246, p = 0.034$; min.10-25: $t(25) = -2.137, p = 0.043$; min.10-30: $t(25) = -3.245, p = 0.003$; min.10-35: $t(25) = -3.291, p = 0.003$; min.10-40: $t(25) = -3.409, p = 0.002$; min.25-40 : $t(25) = -2.653, p = 0.014$.
- Group 3: min.10-15: $t(30) = -3.084, p = 0.004$; min.10-20: $t(30) = -3.800, p = 0.001$; min.10-25: $t(30) = -3.351, p = 0.002$; min.10-30: $t(30) = -3.221, p = 0.003$; min.10-35: $t(30) = -2.932, p = 0.006$; min.10-40: $t(30) = -3.304, p = 0.002$; min.15-20: $t(30) = -2.960, p = 0.006$; min.15-25: $t(30) = -2.595, p = 0.015$; min.15-30: $t(30) = -2.372, p = 0.024$.
- Group 4:
min.10-35: $t(33) = 2.158, p = 0.038$; min.10-40: $t(30) = 3.011, p = 0.005$; min.15-35: $t(30) = 2.859, p = 0.007$; min.15-40: $t(30) = 3.793, p = 0.001$; min.20-30: $t(30) = 2.048, p = 0.049$; min.20-35: $t(30) = 3.127, p = 0.004$; min.20-40: $t(30) = 4.229, p = 0.000$; min.25-35: $t(30) = 2.500, p = 0.018$; min.25-40: $t(30) = 3.970, p = 0.000$; min.30-40: $t(30) = 2.437, p = 0.020$.

Table 1 includes the values of the standard deviations, variances and ranges. The range is the difference between the lowest and the highest score whereas the variance and the standard deviation are indicators of the average distance of the scores from the mean. The two measures are low if the sample is homogenous and they are high in a heterogeneous sample with the scores spread around the mean (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 214). It is interesting to observe that overall the students were the most varied in their assessment of interest and engagement in the lessons during the initial minutes of the classes.

Table 1
The Standard Deviation, Variance and Range in the Four Groups during all Lessons

Group		min. 10	min. 15	min. 20	min. 25	min. 30	min. 35	min. 40
G1	Std. deviation	0.36	0.33	0.34	0.32	0.35	0.34	0.39
	Variance	0.13	0.11	0.12	0.10	0.12	0.11	0.15
	Range	1.47	1.30	1.33	1.24	1.43	1.34	1.54
G2	Std. deviation	0.68	0.42	0.44	0.54	0.49	0.54	0.60
	Variance	0.46	0.17	0.19	0.29	0.24	0.29	0.35
	Range	2.72	1.79	1.64	2.53	1.81	2.24	2.24
G3	Std. deviation	0.78	0.55	0.60	0.66	0.60	0.61	0.62
	Variance	0.60	0.30	0.37	0.44	0.36	0.37	0.38
	Range	3.22	2.35	2.40	2.59	2.46	2.15	2.69
G4	Std. deviation	0.65	0.67	0.51	0.51	0.53	0.42	0.41
	Variance	0.42	0.45	0.26	0.26	0.28	0.17	0.17
	Range	2.70	2.98	2.49	2.49	2.26	1.78	2.00

Although such a general picture of changes in motivational intensity provides some interesting insights into the dynamic nature of motivation, it fails to capture more dramatic changes which frequently occurred in single lessons in all four groups throughout the study. It should be noted, however, that due to limitations of space, it is impossible to discuss all the changes in the intensity of students' motivation in all 121 lessons and in all four groups on a minute-by-minute basis. Therefore, only the results of three randomly chosen lessons in each group (i.e. three lessons in Group 1, three classes in Group 2, etc.) will be offered. In addition, in order to ensure randomness, lessons with the same number (i.e. lesson 4, 11 and 22) in each group are selected. It also has to be stressed that although the lessons are labelled with the same number, the aim is not to compare the lessons taught to one group with lessons taught to another group. The present author assumes that the description of a sample of lesson obtained from each group will, for example, (1) demonstrate that changes in motivational intensity are not characteristic of a particular group of learners but present in all groups and (2) provide a more diversified picture of the issue in question.

As can be seen from Figure 2, Groups 1 and 2 demonstrated high levels of motivation throughout the entire lesson 4 since it did not fall below the four-point-threshold. It should be noted that Group 1 showed the lowest interest and engagement in minutes 15 and 40 and Group 2 in minute 20. Here, however, the drop was quite substantial and equaled 1 point when compared with the highest value (i.e. 5.40 in minute 10). As for Group 3 and Group 4, the former group's level of motivation kept decreasing from the beginning of the lesson to the end of it (i.e. from 5.00 to 3.50 points on a 1-7 scale) and the latter group motivation was the lowest in the first two thirds of the lesson (i.e. from minute 10 to 30) and then it increased a bit in minute 35 only to fall again in minute 40. It has to be noted that a paired-samples *t* test revealed a statistically significant difference in Group 2 between minutes 20-30: $t(4) = -4.000, p = 0.016$.

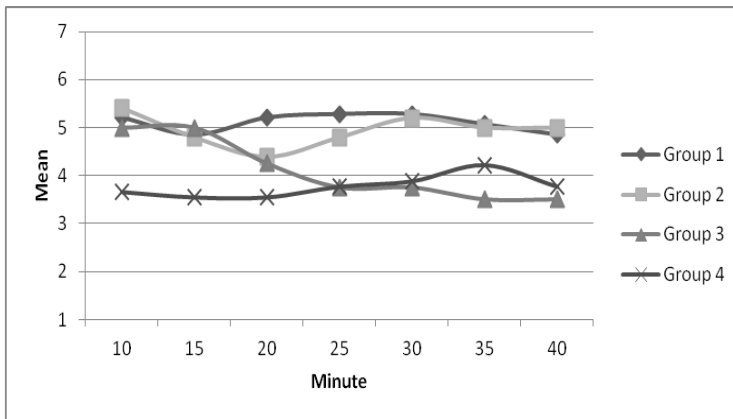


Figure 2. Changes in Motivational Intensity in the Four Groups during Lesson 4

When such changes in the motivational intensity are compared with the lesson plans and what is gleaned from the teacher's notes and observations, it turns out that the high and moderately steady interest and involvement in lesson 4 demonstrated by the students in Group 1 might be related to the variety of activities employed during the lesson and their moderate difficulty (they were devoted to checking a homework assignment, practicing listening, vocabulary and grammar skills). The opposite might explain the low level of motivation in Group 4, since here the lesson was mainly devoted to practicing receptive skills (i.e. reading and listening) and the activities seemed to be quite challenging for the students. Although one might be tempted to conclude on the basis of such findings that a variety of activities might keep students' interest and engagement, and, as a result,

it may lead to fewer changes in motivational intensity, such a diagnosis is somewhat rushed and unfounded. This is because, although the lesson plans in Groups 2 and 3 were identical as well as the activities the learners were asked to do, they did not manage to sustain the initial high level of motivation in Group 3 throughout the whole lessons or make it less susceptible to changes. This might show that it is not what, how and when students are asked to perform, but an array of other factors such as individual differences or modes of work may also be of great significance (for possible causes of such changes see section Individual Interviews).

As far as lesson 11 is concerned, Figure 3 shows that all four groups manifested quite high levels of motivation during the whole class in view of the fact that it oscillated between 3.83 and 5.83 on a 1-7 scale. The patterns also show that except the students in Group 2, the beginning of lesson 11 was less motivating for Groups 1, 3 and 4 and then the level of motivation kept changing throughout the lesson in all four groups. It has to be noted, however, that Groups 1, 3 and 4 showed more motivation at the end of the lesson when compared with the beginning of the class, the only exception being Group 2 whose level of motivation decreased by 0.15. It is also interesting to note that, in the middle of the lesson (i.e. minute 25), the motivation of students in Groups 1, 2 and 4 decreased quite sharply but it increased in Group 3. Another interesting pattern is that the level of motivational intensity in Groups 1 and 2 remained almost the same from minute 15 till the end of the lesson.

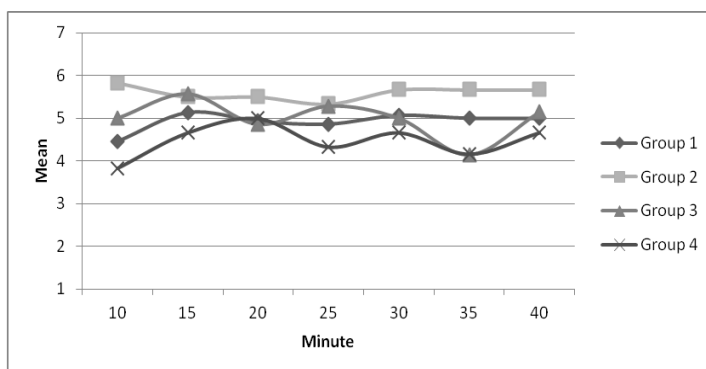


Figure 3. Changes in Motivational Intensity in the Four Groups during Lesson 11

A paired-samples *t* test revealed some statistically significant differences in Group 3 and Group 4:

- Group 3: min. 15-35: $t(6) = 2.705, p = 0.035$; min. 20-35: $t(6) = 2.500, p = 0.047$; min. 25-35: $t(6) = 2.828, p = 0.030$;
- Group 4: min. 10-20: $t(5) = -2.907, p = 0.034$; min. 20-25: $t(6) = 3.162, p = 0.025$; min. 20-35: $t(6) = 2.712, p = 0.042$.

When such variations in the motivational intensity are juxtaposed with the lesson plans and the teacher's notes and observations, it turns out that the classes in Groups 1 and 2 were in their entirety related to practicing English grammar and the lessons in Groups 3 and 4 were dedicated to practicing both vocabulary and grammar. More precisely, the students in Group 1 revised the present simple tense and the past simple tense as well as sequencers and indefinite pronouns. As for the students in Group 2, they performed a set of online activities devoted to practicing modal

verbs. It was also observed that the students in Groups 1 and 2 put quite a lot of effort in performing these activities. As regards learners in Group 3, their lesson started with vocabulary linked with rules of the road and ended with modal verbs. Similarly to the students in Group 3, the subjects in Group 4 began working with English words (words related to work, food and social life) and then practiced grammar (adjectives, the present perfect tense and the past simple tense). These relatively stable levels of motivation detected in the first two groups (i.e. Groups 1 and 2) and the constant fluctuations in interest and engagement in Groups 3 and 4 might be explained in terms of the lessons' focus: the students in Groups 1 and 2 dealt with just one issue (i.e. they practiced grammar) and the learners in Groups 3 and 4 mastered both vocabulary and grammar. It is also interesting to note that the students in Group 2 demonstrated the highest level of motivation. This, in turn, can be explained in terms of the use of interactive online activities which could be perceived by the learners as more attractive than traditional coursebook ones (cf. Kruk, 2013). Finally, and perhaps equally important for the reported high and relatively stable motivation indicated by the learners in Groups 1 and 2, is the observed students' effort put in solving the tasks (for some other potential causes of such variations see section Individual Interviews).

As indicated by the data plotted in Figure 4, there were smaller changes in the level of motivational intensity in lesson 22 in all four groups and the means oscillated around 4 points. A closer examination of Figure 4, however, reveals that the students in Group 1 were more motivated in the second half of the class, so were the subjects in Group 3. On the contrary, the learners in Groups 2 and 4 were more interested and engaged in the activities during the first half of lesson 22, although even here their motivation kept changing from one minute to another. It has to be noted, however, that a paired-samples *t* test did not find any statistically significant differences in the means ($p > .05$).

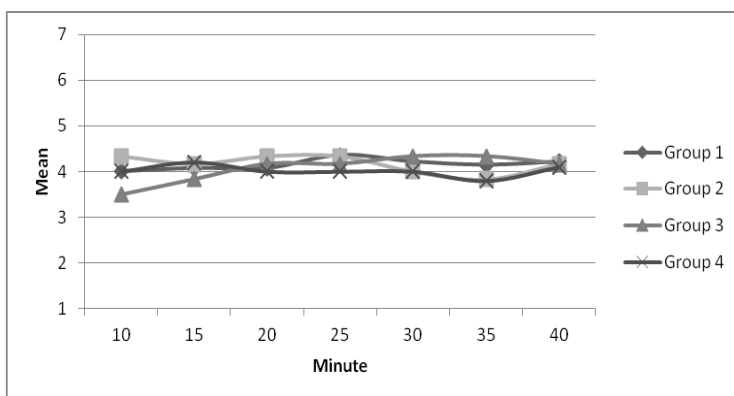


Figure 4. Changes in Motivational Intensity in the Four Groups during Lesson 22

When such changes in the levels of motivation are compared with the lesson plans, the teacher's notes and observations, it appears that the subjects in the first two groups were more involved in reading a dialog in pairs, watching a Power Point presentation related to a grammar structure (i.e. the first conditional) and taking notes than listening to the teacher who provided feedback on the test they took a lesson before (Group 3) or doing grammar exercises than writing a short test (Group 1). As for Group 2 and Group 4, the learners in the former group displayed more motivation in checking a homework assignment and a Power Point presentation related to defining relative clauses plus taking notes but they were less interested in practicing the newly introduced grammar issue in coursebook activities. Similar to the subjects in Group 2, the students in Group 4 were also more involved in checking their homework and in a speaking activity; however, their interest in the lesson dropped during listening and reading tasks. Despite the fact that lesson 22

was perceived by the teacher as appropriate for all the students, the teacher also observed that the subjects in Groups 1 and 3 seemed to enjoy the class more than their counterparts in Groups 2 and 4. In addition to this, the learners in Groups 1 and 3 seemed to be more focused and attentive and they tried to work harder during this lesson. It is also interesting to note that, contrary to what one might believe, the first several minutes of a typical lesson do not have to be the most motivating for language learners. The last minutes of an ordinary class might also engage students, keep them alert and motivated (some other likely causes of such changes are discussed in section Individual Interviews).

Individual Interviews

These ebbs and flows of motivation to learn English during lessons reported above were, to some extent, verified and amplified by the qualitative analysis of the data gathered by means of the individual interviews with randomly selected students from all the groups. Thus, the analysis revealed that during the three interview sessions, some interviewees were the most interested in activities in which they could concurrently practice different language elements (e.g. reading a dialog and learning vocabulary). Some of the students were the most engaged in language activities while working in pairs or in groups in view of the fact that they could help each other in case of problems. The analysis of the data also demonstrated that some learners were very involved and interested in doing easy tasks and language issues they understood better. Relevant excerpts from students' interviews follow¹:

- *I'm the most involved when we act out dialogs and read different texts in English because I can learn a lot of vocabulary then.*
- *I'm interested in listening to dialogs, having conversations in groups and reading dialogs. This is because we can practice English pronunciation, grammar and listen to each other.*
- *I like reading texts in English because I learn a lot of new words and practice grammar.*
- *For me the most motivating form of work is pair-work because I can ask for help the person I work with and we can always help each other when language problems occur.*
- *I'm motivated while working in groups because my classmates can help me if I don't know something.*
- *In the beginning I had problems with understanding the lesson related to defining relative clauses but after a few activities I started to understand the rules and had no major problems in solving more exercises.*
- *I was trying to be more involved in lessons and activities we did but I wasn't able to do everything. I was the most involved in easy activities. I was able to solve successfully.*
- *For me the most engaging are online activities (...) This is because the computer shows the correct and incorrect answers immediately and I can correct grammar mistakes I make.*

The majority of the interviewees regarded learning grammar as the least motivating and interesting element of lessons. When asked to justify their answers they claimed that they did not like to study it in view of the fact that for them it was difficult to understand and remember all the rules and it was boring. In addition, reading and listening activities were also considered as not very interesting and motivating. This is because some students were not able to comprehend texts mostly due to lack of familiarity with the vocabulary. It should also be noted that motivation and interest in lessons or in activities depended on the students' disposition on a particular day or school subjects scheduled before the English lesson. The following excerpts from students' interviews illustrate these points:

- (...) and the most difficult is grammar. I don't like the rules because I can't remember them all. They're so confusing. Learning grammar demotivates me a lot.
- I don't like lessons devoted to grammar. Such lessons are boring.
- I'm not involved in grammar and listening activities because they are difficult for me and I can't understand them.
- Because I lack even basic vocabulary I have problems with reading in English. It discourages me a lot.
- (...) reading comprehension because it's very difficult to read something in English if you don't know many words (...) listening to English recordings is even more difficult. I'm not interested in such activities.
- It depends on the day (...) on previous lessons. If there are tests and if I had to be prepared for other subjects I'm sometimes tired and I'm not willing to study English.

Changes in the Levels of Motivation from one Lesson to the next

The analysis of the data obtained from the motivation grid of the 121 lessons revealed that changes in the motivational intensity can be observed not only during single classes but also from one lesson to the next (see Figure 5). The fluctuations can be found in each group and the changes can be characterized by varied intensity and magnitude. With regard to the economy of the present paper, only the most visible changes in the intensity of motivation will be presented here. It has to be noted that the score for a whole lesson was calculated on the basis of the means for motivational intensity for each of the seven times in a lesson the study participants were requested to indicate the level of interest and involvement. In addition to this, the most practiced language (skills, subsystems, functions, etc.) each lesson dealt with will be provided in parenthesis.

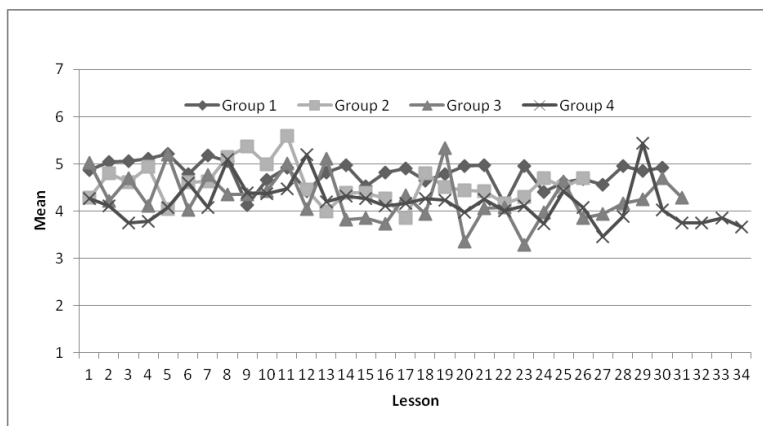


Figure 5. Changes in Motivational Intensity in the Four Groups from One Lesson to Another

Lessons 2 (speaking and writing), 3 (working with a dialog), 4 (vocabulary), 5 (speaking) and 7 (grammar) turned out to be the most motivating for the learners in Group 1 and classes 9 (grammar), 12 (writing), 22 (vocabulary and grammar) and 24 (grammar) appeared to be the least interesting for them. A paired-samples *t* test revealed statistically significant differences between motivation intensity across lessons: 2-9: $t(12) = 5.027, p = 0.000$; 2-22: $t(13) = 2.863, p = 0.013$; 3-9: $t(12) = 2.369, p = 0.035$; 4-9: $t(12) = 3.497, p = 0.004$; 5-9: $t(12) = 2.281, p = 0.042$; 5-12: $t(18)$

= 2.227, $p = 0.039$; 7-9: $t(12) = 3.501$, $p = 0.004$; 7-12: $t(16) = 2.498$, $p = 0.024$; 2-22: $t(13) = 2.576$, $p = 0.023$.

In Group 2, the subjects were the most engaged in lessons 8 (vocabulary and speaking), 9 (working with a dialog and vocabulary) and 11 (online grammar activities) and they were the least involved in classes 13 (reading and speaking) and 17 (writing a test). Also, here, a paired-samples t test showed statistically significant differences between lessons: 8-13: $t(7) = 3.774$, $p = 0.007$; 9-13: $t(8) = 7.086$, $p = 0.000$; 9-17: $t(6) = 2.877$, $p = 0.028$; 11-13: $t(5) = 2.635$, $p = 0.046$; 11-17: $t(5) = 3.068$, $p = 0.028$.

The students in Group 3 pointed to lessons 1 (grammar and speaking), 5 (working with a dialog), 11 (vocabulary, listening and grammar), 13 and 19 (online grammar activities) as the most motivating and the opposite was true in case of classes 20 (writing a test) and 23 (grammar). A paired-samples t test revealed statistically significant differences between lessons: 1-20: $t(8) = 2.376$, $p = 0.045$; 1-23: $t(6) = 3.443$, $p = 0.014$; 5-23: $t(4) = 4.120$, $p = 0.015$; 11-23: $t(6) = 4.433$, $p = 0.004$; 13-23: $t(6) = 4.891$, $p = 0.003$; 19-23: $t(5) = 4.515$, $p = 0.006$.

Finally, only three lessons i.e. 8 (speaking), 12 and 29 (writing a test) were the most motivating for the learners in Group 4 and in as many as five classes i.e. 3 (grammar and speaking), 24 (vocabulary), 27, 32 and 34 (listening and reading) the learners were the least engaged and involved. A series of paired-samples t test yielded statistically significant differences between lessons: 8-3: $t(9) = 3.077$, $p = 0.013$; 8-24: $t(8) = 4.427$, $p = 0.002$; 8-27: $t(4) = 3.244$, $p = 0.032$; 8-32: $t(9) = 4.326$, $p = 0.002$; 8-34: $t(8) = 3.395$, $p = 0.009$; 12-3: $t(9) = 2.661$, $p = 0.026$; 12-24: $t(8) = 4.820$, $p = 0.001$; 12-27: $t(4) = 4.762$, $p = 0.009$; 12-32: $t(9) = 3.408$, $p = 0.008$; 12-34: $t(8) = 3.400$, $p = 0.009$; 29-3: $t(8) = 5.591$, $p = 0.001$; 29-24: $t(8) = 3.714$, $p = 0.006$; 29-27: $t(4) = 7.242$, $p = 0.002$; 29-32: $t(8) = 2.920$, $p = 0.019$; 29-34: $t(8) = 2.761$, $p = 0.025$.

Even though such findings point to what might be regarded as the most motivating lesson for students (e.g. lessons mostly devoted to speaking, grammar or vocabulary) and what might not be of interest to them (e.g. lessons mostly dedicated to practicing grammar, listening and reading), they also show that for one group a similar lesson (i.e. a lesson which deals with a similar issue) may or may not be considered as motivating (e.g. a lesson devoted to writing a test was highly motivating for Group 4 but not for the subjects in Groups 2 and 3). This might indicate that some other variables influence students' interest and engagement during lessons such as individual differences, group dynamics, situations and contexts as well as learners' disposition on a given day or the classroom atmosphere (cf. Pawlak, 2012).

In addition, the analysis of the data revealed some relatively stable periods in the intensity of the learners' motivation. These were usually sequences of three or four lessons and occurred at various points in time. The differences in the means among the lessons in these stable phases were small (they never surpassed 0.21 of a point) and they, as revealed by a paired-samples t test, did not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$). In Group 1, two such series of lessons can be found: (1) from lesson 2 to lesson 5 and (2) from lesson 28 to 30. When it comes to Group 2 and Group 3, such sequences of classes appeared between lessons 14 and 16 as well as classes 19-21 for the former group and between lessons 8-10 and 14-16 for the latter one. As for Group 4, there were two short sequences of lessons which encompassed lessons 9-11 and 31-33 as well as a longer one which included seven classes, i.e. 13-19. As was the case with the most motivating classes, the ones mentioned here were in their majority also dedicated to practicing various language skills and subsystems. For example, they dealt with speaking and writing, working with a dialog and new words (Group 1, lessons 2-5), grammar, reading and speaking and a combination of speaking, listening and writing (Group 3, lessons 14-16) or listening and reading, writing and lexicogrammatical exercises (Group 4, lessons 9-11). It has to be stressed, however, that these quite

steady sequences of lessons were often preceded or followed by a sudden increase or decrease in the level of motivation.

These ups and downs of motivation to learn English manifested by the learners in the four groups from one language lesson to another show that motivation is in a continuous state of flux. Although the patterns that emerged from the data were sometimes contradictory and difficult to explain, they were to some extent corroborated by the qualitative analysis of the individual interviews with randomly selected learners from all four groups (see section Individual Interviews). Thus, some changes in the levels of motivation may be explained in terms of interrelated factors connected with the lesson, learners and school. The first one may include such variables as the attractiveness of the topics (e.g. “at the travel agent’s”) or the lack of it (e.g. “writing a bus tour itinerary”), the level of difficulty of topics, tasks and activities covered in the lessons or the way they were implemented and practiced by the students (e.g. coursebook vs. online grammar activities or individual vs. pair-work) as well as the use of the coursebook and other language materials. The second one may encompass the learners’ age, the students’ language abilities to solve some problems and tiredness. The third factor, i.e. the school, may comprise the timetable, the number of other school subjects scheduled before and after the English lesson and learners’ weekly workload.

Conclusions

The study reported in this paper offered some evidence for the changing nature of foreign language learning motivation. The results demonstrated that motivation changes not only during a single class but also from one language lesson to another over a period of several months. It should also be noted that some recurring series of lessons during which a relatively stable level of motivational intensity occurred were detected. These periods, however, were often preceded or followed by a sudden decrease or increase in motivation. A set of interrelated factors responsible for the changes in the motivational intensity were identified and divided into those connected with the lesson, learners and school. When it comes to the first factor (i.e. the lesson), it included such variables as attractiveness of the topics or the lack of it, the level of difficulty of topics, tasks and activities covered in the lessons or the way they are implemented and practiced by students as well as the time of the lesson and its phases, the use of the coursebook and other language materials. It has to be noted that some other variables related to this factor might also involve the time of the lesson and its phases as well as the relationship between the students or the English teacher’s rapport with the learners. As regards the second factor (i.e. the learners), it encompassed the students’ age, their abilities to solve language problems and fatigue. It needs to be added that students’ willingness to attend lessons or school may also come into play. As for the third factor (i.e. the school), it comprised the timetable or the number of other school subjects scheduled before and after the English lesson and students’ weekly workload; however, variables such as school educational objectives or its general status in local environment may also play a role here.

Although it is important to identify factors which cause or have a positive impact on motivation, it has to be borne in mind that what might be motivating, attractive and involving for one group of language learners may not be at all interesting and engaging for another group of students. To make matters even more complicated, it can be further assumed that a topic or a set of activities perceived by the same learners at one point in time as involving, may not be as engaging or even dull and boring when implemented in the same group of students at a later point in time. Such a situation can pose a challenge for language teachers, who, on the one hand, want to make their lessons attractive and interesting, and, on the other, are aware of the fact that they may fail to achieve it. This is because during a single language lesson teachers might take care of only some of

the factors (e.g. choice of activities or modes of work), while others are beyond their reach (e.g. timetable or learners' weekly workload). All this shows how difficult it is for teachers to prepare and conduct a language lesson. It seems, then, that the best solution would be to decide on what to cover and how to implement the material right on the spot, which is, of course, difficult to accomplish in view of the fact that it takes time and effort to plan a lesson and prepare language activities and yet all of this has to be done in accordance with core curriculum and syllabus. Although one may claim that teachers should be prepared to deal with such problems whenever deemed necessary, it would be unreasonable to demand from every language teacher (beginner teachers in particular) to always take such instantaneous actions. This is not to say, of course, that lesson plans are not subject to modifications or the attractiveness of topics and activities does not have to be evaluated by teachers, but such decisions need to be taken with caution and reflection.

The study is not immune from limitations. One of the weaknesses is related to the fact that it was not easy to clearly indicate factors responsible for variations in the motivational intensity. Another limitation concerns the design of the study which included four groups of learners consisting mostly of male students. Yet another weakness relates to the way of gathering data, which was mainly done by means of a short questionnaire, i.e. the motivational grid where the participants were required to show the levels of their interest and involvement seven times during a lesson. It may have been somewhat difficult for the subjects to express their real attitude to the lessons and activities they were requested to perform. All of this demonstrates that further research is needed in this area. Future research projects into the dynamic nature of motivation should target other groups of learners (i.e. learners of various levels of proficiency and of different educational levels), draw upon other instruments of data collection and combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

It is the belief of the author that despite these limitations just mentioned, the longitudinal nature of the study offers some important insights into the dynamic nature of foreign language motivation. In addition, the present researcher believes that the results of the present study constitute a promising line of inquiry which is certainly worth pursuing.

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¹ The excerpts are translations of the learners' responses by the present author.