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SUGGESTIONS FOR POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE MILITARY ENGLISH COURSES IN THE 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM

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Abstract: The paper analyses different types of language acquisition-related values and attitudes, i.e. intrinsic, integrative and instrumental values; it also takes into consideration how difficult it is to modify one's value system in a positive way, as a means of changing individual attitude and perception as to learning English. The basic idea of the paper is that values cannot be transmitted directly through traditional instruction, but can be socialized rather by centering teaching on three main processes, i.e., exposure to recognized language-acquisition models, persuasive communication and student involvement in the development and success of the linguistic program.

Keywords: motivation, motivational strategies, English language learning

1. INTRODUCTION

People often use the term 'motivation' to express the idea that success or failure in any learning situation (in our particular case, in learning a foreign language) are to a large extent caused by the student's enthusiasm, involvement and endeavor. Motivation-related issues underlie the most basic aspects of the human mind, inasmuch as they provide a driving engine for an individual or collective enterprise: in other words, if the reason is strong and relevant, regardless of the individual's language aptitude, any effort/sacrifice is worth making.

So far, the papers and studies made on the language courses in the Romanian military education system have focused on the life-long (encompassing both the 'intensive' and 'non-intensive' type) learning component. In the context of the recent developments and normal evolution of the approach to European education in

general (e.g. the Bologna process, the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, abbreviated as CEFR) and in NATO in particular (e.g. the 'smart defense' concept imposing new training and education requirements), the aim of our study is:

- to provide the general framework for the English language modules conducted within the Master's degree courses of "Carol I" National Defense University, by referring to the challenges, constraints and shortcomings we have identified;
- to suggest possible and feasible motivational strategies for the students in this respect, starting from a critical analysis of the theoretical framework resulting from the careful reading of the dedicated bibliography.

The greatest challenges we are currently being faced with in conducting the English language module for the Master's degree courses are the following:

- the areas of expertise addressed are: Joint command – Land Forces; Joint command – Air Force; Joint command – Navy; Logistic Management; Economic-Financial Management;
- the selection for courses is competition-based and the first test to qualify for admittance is a written exam in English (level A2 on the CEFR scale);
- English is a compulsory subject matter;
- the total length of the module is 42 hours, conducted in 1 semester out of the total of four throughout the 2-year master's degree study program;
- the number of hours allocated for the study of service-related military English is insufficient to develop the core competencies and skills included in the syllabi;
- the students' interests are mainly focused on their area of expertise, rather than the study of the foreign language;

Even from this concise description it is obvious how important it is for us teachers of military English to concern ourselves with the fostering of master's degree student motivation, as it is considered to be the most effective and proactive power relationship that can be established in the classroom and beyond.

Here we need to differentiate between the two basic types of motivation, i.e., intrinsic vs. extrinsic. The discussion needs to be extended to the consideration of group processes, because teaching implies the existence of a group of people undergoing training in a specific area and whom teachers are called on to motivate.

Tuckman (1969, quoted in Argyle, 1969) established that a group went through four stages from its formation, which has

important implications for the study of the classroom and the use of group activities during teaching. The stages are as follows:

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing

Throughout these processes, the teacher is a sort of magician who is expected to have 'tricks **and** treats' in his/her hat in the attempt to manage their classroom and motivate the learners. In other words, the teacher should lure students and motivate them to learn.

Our experience of MELT teachers has demonstrated that one of the keys to success in the classroom is to keep in mind that the student's general perception of school activities is that the latter are mostly boring, with little reward and scarcely connected to the student's interests; moreover, that it is the teacher's task to make learning fun and enjoyable, hopefully useful and rewarding.

What is to be done? One remedy we used was to remove the imaginary T-S barrier and to transfer some of the course responsibility to the students, by empowering them to decide on topics to be included in the syllabus, on activities which appealed to them in order to better meet their expectations. Apart from these, for this is the result of empirical experience, we needed a scientific background and a theoretical approach to the matter in order to identify the motivational strategies to be used on our target student population.

An important element in the framework of motivational strategies is to make decisions on their organization into separate themes. The following taxonomy, around which our main discussion will revolve, is based on the process-oriented model by Dornyei and Otto (1998:43-69). The key units in this taxonomy are as follows:

- *Creating the basic motivational conditions;*
- *Generating student motivation;*
- *Maintaining and protecting motivation;*
- *Encouraging positive self-evaluation.*



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2. CREATING THE BASIC MOTIVATIONAL CONDITIONS

Keeping in mind that motivational strategies cannot work in a vacuum, the first taxonomy says it is imperative to meet first some prerequisites before any attempts to generate motivation can be effective. Some of these conditions will be elaborated on in what follows.

Among the most powerful motivational tools, the dedicated literature (Dorney, 2001:43-50) stresses out the teacher's behavior complemented by teacher-student rapport. Consequently, our efforts are channeled to establishing and fostering good rapport with the students, promoting mutual trust and respect, considering them performers in the same successful play: this further leads to enthusiastic learners, as shareholders of the benefits and course gains. One more key element in this equation is the empathetic teacher, who also admits he/she as a linguist cannot have the students' expertise in their military specialty and who is open to learning from them about the military field and all it encompasses. In this way learning is demonstrated as a two-way road: the teacher is interested in the subject matter, is committed to learning too.

Next, we highly praise the classroom atmosphere, in the sense that – if the latter was supportive and pleasant – it became obvious that student motivation reached its peak: learners could freely express opinions, felt safe among friends and peers, and learning turned out to be a seamless experience. Other ingredients to spice up the recipe of motivation that we would like to stress out are: offering students opportunities

for expression, steady encouragement and support, acknowledgement of their efforts.

In addition to the above, it stands to reason that the teacher who fosters cooperative learning, by denying counterproductive competition and promoting cohesiveness, is ultimately an enabler of the students' increased motivation and commitment to learn.

3. GENERATING STUDENT MOTIVATION

Thanasoulas (<http://iteslj.org/>) lists some of the demotivating or weakening factors affecting the students, e.g. “compulsory school attendance, curriculum content and grades – most importantly, the premium placed on them”. The solution the author suggests and which we have successfully adopted falls into the teachers' bailiwick, namely “to increase their learners' ‘goal-orientedness’, make curriculum relevant for them, and create realistic learner beliefs”.

As far as the two solutions are concerned, our method is to make a needs-analysis upon the first encounter with the students in order to find out together what that specific group's goals and topics of interest are, and to incorporate them ASAP in the syllabus. Fast positive reaction is therefore a display of the teacher's willingness to share and adapt to the learners' needs and concerns.

Sometimes, having too high, unrealistic expectations of personal progress can have a strong demotivating impact. Besides, there are other deterrents of students' progress. Traditional approach may look obsolete and determine students' lagging in as it is not connected with the new information society where knowledge is

praised above all. New courses with a modern flavor are student-centered, teachers' effort being towards developing modern ways to motivate them and build their language awareness. In addition, teachers become a sort of jack-of-all-trades having to master different fields in order to develop successful and motivational courses. The result will be on the one hand, a highly complex course which will combine the latest in education: learning platforms, use of social media, portfolios, on the one hand, and student-approach, cooperative learning, self-paced learning, and life-long learning, on the other.

The use of modern technology and the Internet is considered to build motivation as it offers access to a huge database of knowledge that can improve learning. The learners of the 21st century are accustomed to using modern technologies, tablets, ePads, mobile phones etc. to browse for knowledge so the eLearning comes as a normal consequence of this trend. Moreover, life-long learning has got a new dimension with the use of PLEs (Personal Learning Environments) or VLSs (Virtual Learning Environments) which mirror the advancement in science and education with the settling down of communities of learners who use blogs, social media, and wikies, and are interested in learning by cooperation and socialization.

Self-development and continuous learning is also based on the new identity people create by activating on the Internet and being covered by its anonymous character. This new identity people build helps them to express their ideas in a freer way so many proponents of eLearning consider virtual classes and avatars as a better motivational source than the traditional, face-to-face approach.

According to Andrew Churches (<http://www.masternewmedia.org>), the profile of the educator has to change in order to meet students' needs in the 21st century. The new teacher has to possess multiple technological and educational skills to be successful and manage to motivate students. In the technological society, the educator will

be a combination of many characteristics having to function as:

- adaptor
- communicator
- learner
- visionary
- leader
- model
- collaborator
- risk taker.

One of the most important features of on-line courses is that they are designed to motivate students to actively participate in their learning while discovering by themselves optimal methods and techniques. The success of eLearning is due to students' involvement and understanding of the nature of second language learning so that they will not have false beliefs and pre-conceived notions that may hinder their language acquisition.

Motivation is therefore an important feature to be taken into account and protected during the course as it can be easily worn out in time and result in demotivation.

The on-line courses improve learners' **self-confidence** as they provide them with the possibility of making decisions on the content, the moment, and the time of learning. As many language courses offer packages of activities learners' can choose from, the content of a course is more flexible than the one from the traditional approach.

By providing encouragement, the less stressful environment filtered by the platform, by creating contexts where students can have regular experiences of success, and by prompting them to contribute to their learning, the virtual teacher will build and foster motivation.

In addition, asynchronous courses offer the possibility of access to courses from different locations and at a moment chosen by the learner, a very motivational feature to the military personnel who have limited time or are involved in other activities: attending other courses, going to work, having busy schedules, participating in missions, being involved in research projects etc.



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Another motivational strategy is the creation of **autonomous learners** who are able to make decisions and assess their knowledge in a realistic way. In an on-line course, platforms provide better classroom management with the implementation of features that allow the creation of sub-groups so that learners with different proficiency levels will find their place and feel that they become autonomous in their study. The on-line courses and the use of the Internet will help students establish the direction of their learning, and make them more responsible in their self-directed study.

Reinders (2010: 46-49) talks about five stages to improve learners' autonomy:

- identifying needs and connecting them with class activities,
- setting goals by helping learners identify realistic ones,
- planning learning and involving students in deciding what to learn and the pace of learning,
- selecting resources by providing students with the possibility to bring their own authentic materials and share,
- selecting learning strategies and allowing students to discuss and get familiarized with them,
- practicing by allowing students' to make decisions regarding activities, homework etc.,
- monitoring progress that will be recorded in a learning diary,
- providing assessment and revision by suggesting alternate forms of evaluation, checklists, portfolios, peer and self-assessment.

Building motivation is difficult to master as it requires not only thorough

preparation, but also interest and dedication. According to Good and Brophy (1996: 228), "the simplest way to ensure that people value what they are doing is to maximize their free choice and autonomy."

4. CONCLUSION

As Ushioda (1997:41) states, "self-motivation is a question of thinking effectively and meaningfully about learning experience and learning goals. It is a question of applying positive thought patterns and belief structures so as to optimize and sustain one's involvement in learning". Motivation can be improved using more means, however, regardless of them, it is up teachers' decision, dedication and commitment to obtain positive results. By creating the basic motivational conditions, generating, maintaining and protecting student motivation, and encouraging positive self-evaluation, the teacher will foster a pleasant classroom environment that will enhance and ensure learning.

Learners' autonomy will enable them to make decisions and assess their knowledge in a realistic way. The implementation of eLearning courses will provide the modern and technological environment that will suit learners who are accustomed to the demands of the information society.

Therefore, motivation is one of the most important elements of a course as it enhances and supports the fulfillment of objectives, the assessment of needs, the use of activities, and the design of a relevant classroom management by fostering a pleasant and demanding learning environment.

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