

# The Motivation of Second/Foreign Language Teachers

## A Review of the Literature

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**Abstract** In order to offer a picture of the construct of language teacher motivation, this paper is subdivided into two main sections. In the first part, the main framework for exploring this specific construct is presented and, considering it as mostly social, insights have been drawn from Atkinson's sociocognitive approach, from complexity theory and from theories of mediation. In the second part, the teacher's mind is investigated and the scaffolding for its description is provided by the triadic distinction between *cognition*, *affect* and *motivation*.

**Summary** 1. The 'social side' of teaching. – 2. The 'hidden side' of teaching. – 3. Conclusion.

### 1 Introduction

The myth that teachers do not make a difference in student learning has been refuted. (Brophy and Good 1986, p. 370)

Several reports from different countries say «that teachers are *not* motivated to teach and that this tendency is actually getting worse» (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011, pp. 167-168, italics in the original). Unfortunately, the amount of research in the field of language teacher motivation is still meagre (Dörnyei, 2003; Kassagby et al., 2001) as «the motivation of language teachers has been researched much less than the motivation of language learners» (Kassagby et al. 2001, p. 213). A number of studies in the recent past – not only in the field of SLA – offer evidence to the fact that teacher motivation is crucial for increasing their students' own motivation (for a review, see Kunter et al. 2008, p. 469). As regards language teachers, Dörnyei and Ushioda claim that

the teacher level of enthusiasm and commitment is one of the most important factors that can affect learners' motivation to learn. [...] if a teacher is motivated to teach, there is a good chance that his or her students will be motivated to learn (Dörnyei, Ushioda, 2011, p. 158).

Support to this statement is provided by several studies (among others, those by Dörnyei, Csizér 1998; Cheng, Dörnyei, 2007; Bernaus, Gardner

2008; Guilloteaux, Dörnyei, 2008; Csizér, Kormos 2009; Papi, Abdollahzadeh 2012; Moskowsky et al. 2013) which highlight the link between teacher motivational strategies and student motivated behaviour, thus confirming Dörnyei's argument (Dörnyei 2001) that teachers are responsible for motivating students. In addition, it seems reasonable to think that language teachers can affect their learners' motivation not only by adopting motivational strategies but also by being motivated themselves.

## 2 The 'social side' of teaching

In agreement with Atkinson, we believe that language «is always mutually, simultaneously, and co-constitutively in the *head* and in the *world*» (Atkinson 2002, p. 538, emphasis added), thus it is both a *cognitive* and a *social* phenomenon. The most direct implication of this is that «learning and teaching go hand-in-hand» (Atkinson 2002, p. 538), since language learning does not happen in a 'social void' and in the head of the learner only, but it is the result of the interrelationship between the learner, the teacher and the sociocultural setting in which they are immersed.

There are two main reasons for which a sociocognitive approach has been adopted here with the general aim of investigating the motivation of language teachers. First of all, as previously said, we acknowledge that there is a need to conceptualize the learner *and* the teacher as an interactional unit in their effort to pursue socio-cognitive tasks, i.e. learning a second/foreign language, that the learner could not otherwise perform independently; therefore, not only the learner but the *teacher* as well represents a central component in the process of second/foreign language learning. It is thus fundamental to explore the *cognitive* concept of language teacher motivation in order to better understand the (*social*) link between the motivation of teachers and the motivation of their learners. Secondly, the sociocognitive approach is an attempt to overcome the «bifurcation in the field» (Lafford 2007, p. 746), and to conciliate the two conflicting ontologies of cognitivism and socioculturalism, the «two parallel SLA worlds» (Zuengler, Miller 2006), the two «polarizing dichotomies» (Ushioda, Dörnyei 2012, p. 405). Indeed language, its acquisition *and* its teaching are not only cognitive processes (in the head) but also social (in the world).

With the aim of accomodating different perspectives or different constructs within SLA, several scholars have adopted complexity theory. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron state that complexity theory is an «umbrella term» (Larsen-Freeman, Cameron 2008, p. 200) covering similar theories, such as complexity theory, chaos theory, dynamic(al) systems theory and complex systems theory. In particular, complexity theory was adopted to

explore the interconnections between identity, motivation and autonomy within SLA (Sade, L.A. 2011; Paiva, V.L.M. de O. 2011) and as a means for accommodating both sociocultural and cognitive perspectives within SLA (Larsen-Freeman, 2002; in Zuengler, Miller 2006). Ushioda and Dörnyei adopted a dynamic systems perspective in order to investigate the interactions between the 'inner side' of the learner and the surrounding context, affirming that «processes of motivation, cognition and emotion and their constituent components continuously interact with one another and the developing context, thereby changing and causing change, as the system as a whole restructures, adapts and evolves» (Ushioda, Dörnyei 2012, p. 400). In a similar vein, we aim at investigating the interactions between the «hidden side» (Freeman 2002) of language teachers - cognition, affect and motivation - with the social context of instruction, and this means with their learners above of all.

In agreement with Brophy and Good, we believe that «classrooms are complex social settings» (Brophy, Good, 1986 p. 370) and the type of causality which operates within them is co-adaptation. Co-adaptation is a sort of mutual causality according to which change in one system can cause change in another system connected to the previous one (Larsen-Freeman, Cameron 2008). This is exactly what occurs in classrooms and «from co-adaptation of teacher and student behaviors emerges a structure at another level, one that we might call *the lesson*» (Larsen-Freeman, Cameron, 2008 p. 203, italics in the original). Therefore, we could well expect that changes in the language teacher may produce changes in the language learner and, to complete the syllogism, changes in the motivation of teachers may lead to changes in the motivation of their students.

Past philosophers, psychologists and pedagogues as well recognized the social complexity of classrooms and the fundamental role of the *teacher* in the learning process.<sup>1</sup> Dewey himself maintained that the classroom is a microcosm of the larger social world, mirroring its democratic and co-operative functions (Dewey 1916/1966, in Ushioda 2006, p. 159). Von Glasersfeld (in Williams, Burden 1997), father of radical constructivism, stressed the importance of the teacher's *orienting function*, while social constructivists viewed teaching as an attempt to make students bring meaning to their lives, thus opposing the concept of *education* to that of mere instruction. Feuerstein posited a theory of *mediation*, emphasizing

1 In this respect, as regards motivation, Ushioda and Dörnyei affirm that «certain aspects of [...] *teacher-student relations* were identified as significant in shaping students' intrinsic motivation» (Ushioda, Dörnyei 2012, p. 404, emphasis added).

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the interactive nature of the teacher-learner relationship,<sup>2</sup> according to which the key features of any learning activity are *significance, transcend-*

<sup>2</sup> Ushioda and Dörnyei stress the «important role of *teacher feedback* and *teacher-learner dialog* in helping learners to reflect on their learning progress» (Ushioda, Dörnyei 2012, p. 405, emphasis added).

ence, i.e. purpose beyond the here and now, and *reciprocity*, i.e. shared intention (Feuerstein et al. 1991, in Williams, Burden 1997, emphasis added). Vygotsky as well, within the framework of sociocultural theory, proposed his own view of mediation in language acquisition (Lantolf 1994; Lantolf, Appel 1994; Donato, McCormick 1994; Williams, Burden 1997; Zuengler, Miller 2006; Ushioda 2006), claiming that human cognition, i.e. all mental processing, is a *mediated* mental activity and that this mediation is «the instrument of cognitive change» (Donato, McCormick 1994, p. 456). In the light of sociocultural theory, we could affirm that there is a link between teacher, learners, instructional context and culture so that the learner cannot be considered an isolated unit in his/her effort to learn a second/foreign language. In Vygotsky's words, «the *social* dimension of consciousness [i.e. all mental processes] is *primary* in time and fact. The *individual* dimension of consciousness is *derivative* and *secondary*» (Vygotsky 1979, in Zuengler, Miller 2006, p. 38, emphasis added). Bailey et al. conclude that

the two parties in the teacher-student relationship have their own responsibilities, their own contributions to make to the learning process. [...] Both the teacher and the students contribute to a positive learning environment by respecting each other and by *being committed* to doing their best (Bailey et al. 1996, p. 20, emphasis added).

To sum up, it could be said that both the recent contribution of complexity theory and the sociocognitive approach to second/foreign language learning maintain that 1. classrooms are social, complex systems in which the relationship between teacher and learner cannot be overlooked, so that second/foreign language learning becomes second/foreign language learning *and* teaching; 2. being classrooms complex settings in which change in a component produces change in another component, the motivation of the language teacher inevitably impacts on the motivation of language learners (and this finding has been confirmed by several studies, cfr. § Introduction); 3. the constitutive elements of the «hidden side» (Freeman 2002) of teachers not only 'communicate' as a whole with the immediate, surrounding sociocultural context (including learners, above all), but also interact with each other. This last point will be further developed in the next paragraph.

### 3 The 'hidden side' of teaching

The scaffolding for the description of the «unobservable dimension» (Borg 2003) of teachers is provided by the triadic distinction through which psychologists characterize the human mind: *cognition* (i.e. what one knows

and thinks), *affect* (i.e. what one feels) and *conation* (i.e. what one wants or desires) (Snow, Corno, Jackson 1996, in Dörnyei 2001). Conation, here referred to as *motivation*, represents «one of the most basic aspects of the human mind» (Dörnyei 2001, p. 2). In the light of complexity theory (cfr. § 1), it is assumed that the three aspects interact with each other and therefore cognition and affect have an impact on the motivation of the language teacher.<sup>3</sup> The three dimensions will now be examined in detail.

### 3.1 Teacher Cognition

Borg defines *teacher cognition* as «the unobservable dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think» (Borg 2003, italics in the original, p. 81).<sup>4</sup> In agreement with this definition, it is possible to affirm that cognition comprehends both an ‘explicit’ knowledge and an ‘implicit’ knowledge.

‘Explicit’ knowledge is represented by what teachers have learnt during their years of training and it largely consists of «theories of practice» (Burns 1996, emphasis added), namely the theoretical knowledge acquired during teacher education. Shulman calls this type of knowledge «pedagogical content knowledge» (PCK) and defines it as «that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding» (Shulman 1987, in Zembylas 2007, p. 355). The language through which teachers organize their conceptual world is a «professional language» (Freeman 1996), a sort of ‘discourse’ that has both a cognitive function – i.e. organizing the teachers’ professional world «according to the values and meanings of their group» (Gee 1989, in Freeman 1996, p. 235) – and a referential function because, through it, teachers become recognized members of a definite group.

‘Implicit’ knowledge is the «hidden side of the work» (Freeman 2002), what teachers believe and think. Burns defines it in terms of «theories for practice» (Burns 1996, emphasis added), specifically those cognitive structures that teachers adopt for planning, decision making, and behaving in the language classroom. According to Kennedy, this type of teacher knowledge has been indelibly imprinted by the teachers’ «own experiences

3 We are well aware that these three psychological dimensions are not discrete entities and therefore they do not have definite boundaries. It is thus difficult – if not impossible – to say exactly where one ends and the other begins: they are deeply interrelated with each other.

4 In a recent article, however, Borg claims that «The study of teacher cognition, given its concern for understanding the unobservable dimension of teachers’ lives, in no way excludes attention to *emotions*» (Borg 2012, p. 12, emphasis added). We would also suggest attention to *motivation* as well, given that it also represents a ‘portion’ – with blurred boundaries – of the unobservable dimension of teachers’ lives.

as students» (Kennedy 1990, in Bailey et al. 1996, p. 11), by their «apprenticeship of observation» (Lortie 1975, in Bailey et al. 1996). Goodlad concludes that the result of the teachers' experiences as students first and teacher trainees afterwards is that they generally «teach as [they] have been taught» (Goodlad 1983, in Knezevic, Scholl 1996, p. 81). The consequence is that the role of teacher 'models' is crucial because during their «apprenticeship of observation» trainee teachers internalize examples of good and bad behaviour (Bailey et al. 1996) to adopt and avoid, respectively, in their future career as teachers. Thus, the teachers' experience, positive or negative, of their own language learning at school first and university later influences their cognition (Barnard, Burns 2012).

'Explicit' and 'implicit' knowledge interact with each other and as «teachers select and modify theoretical ideas in ways that are consistent with their personal beliefs about teaching and learning and their practical knowledge of the ESL context» (Binnie Smith 1996, p. 214), this interaction impacts on classroom practice (Gutierrez Almarza 1996). It is through the interplay between their «theories for practice» and «theories of practice» (Burns 1996) that teachers come to understand their conceptions of themselves as teachers, their vision, and their limits (Johnson 1996).

### 3.2 Teacher Affect

The most relevant theoretical contributions on the role of emotions in SLA were those by Magda B. Arnold, Jane Arnold and Schumann, who adopted M.B. Arnold's theory in language teaching. Both M.B. Arnold's Cognitive Theory of Emotions (M.B. Arnold 1960, and J. Arnold 1999, in Balboni 2013), and Schumann's Input Appraisal Theory (Schumann 1998, 2004, in Daloiso 2009, and in Balboni 2013) agree on the fact that each *emotional* stimulus from the outside is evaluated by the human brain following a series of criteria, in order to facilitate (or hinder) the repetition of the experience. These theories were primarily referred to language learners but they make sense for teachers as well in that for both, teacher and students, emotions play a crucial role, being parent elements of conscious feelings and motivational drives.

Several studies in the recent past explored emotions in teaching practice in many different contexts. Cowie analyzed the emotional dimension of teaching among university EFL professors in Japan (Cowie 2011). Martin and his colleagues investigated the emotions of secondary school teachers during classroom disruptions, emotions that were responsible for initiating a cognitive-emotional dynamic producing behavioural responses (Martin et al. 2004). Martínez inquired into the emotional impact of the language teacher's personality both on teaching and learning a second language

(Martínez, 2010 p. 89). Thurairaj and Roy conducted a research aimed at exploring teachers' emotions towards the available ELT textbooks and at finding out whether teachers experience positive or negative emotions in their use of ELT textbooks due to their visual design (Thurairaj, Roy 2012). Exploring teacher stress in native and non-native EFL teachers, Mousavi emphasized the importance of the emotional state of both teacher and students, affirming that «since they [teacher and students] are constantly interacting with each other, we cannot consider the emotional state of one group whilst ignoring the concerns of the other. The general outcome of the lesson depends on the quality of such interactions» (Mousavi 2007, p. 33). Researching the interrelationship between emotional knowledge and PCK in teaching, Zembylas concluded that the fact of giving special attention to the emotional dimensions of PCK «will contribute to a fuller understanding of the impact of emotions on the personal well-being and motivation of teachers» (Zembylas 2007, p. 366). In one of his latest articles, Balboni analyzed the role of emotions in the teaching practice (Balboni 2013). Referring to the Greek philosopher Plato, the scholar adopted the triadic distinction between *Eros* (pleasure), *Pathos* (grief), and *Epithymia* (desire): while the first two are *in praesentia* and impact on the teacher's everyday classroom behaviour, the third is *in absentia* and stimulates his/her vision of an ideal future. Balboni claimed that the main source of pleasure for teachers is their classroom activity itself: «il piacere di insegnare si conquista ora per ora, a scuola, insegnando bene» (Balboni 2006, p. 26). About the crucial role of emotions in language teaching, Balboni concluded that «le emozioni influenzano la *motivazione* dell'insegnante, la sua gestione della classe, ma anche la sua *capacità cognitiva*, ad esempio nel classificare gli studenti e nel valutarne i risultati» (Balboni 2013, § 5, emphasis added), thus highlighting the interrelationship between emotion, motivation and cognition.

### 3.3 Teacher Motivation

A relatively recent issue of *Language Learning* (issue n. 18, 2008) was entirely dedicated to motivation for teaching, not only language teaching. In their guest editorial, Watt and Richardson talk about a «*Zeitgeist* of interest» in the topic (Watt, Richardson 2008a, p. 405, italics in the original), stressing the urgency of research in this field.

Several scholars explored teacher motivation according to expectancy theory (Walker, Symons 1997; McKeachie 1997; Mowday, Nam 1997; Watt, Richardson 2008b), agreeing on the fact that a teacher is motivated when s/he knows that the effort expended will lead to the desired outcome, i.e. a meaningful learning experience for his/her students, and this will in



turn produce valuable effects in terms of powerful intrinsic rewards, i.e. students' growth, improvement, satisfaction (Mowday, Nam 1997).

Others inquired into this field by means of self-efficacy theories (Goddard et al. 2000; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy 2001; Labone 2004; Woolfolk Hoy, Burke Spero 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy 2007). Self-efficacy is perceived as a «sense of mastery over the environment» (Walker, Symons 1997, p. 11) and teachers «with strong self-efficacy beliefs view themselves as able to perform a task [i.e. teaching] in an efficacious manner. The result is persistence and a high level of effort to complete the task» (Bandura 1982, in Walker, Symons 1997, p. 11).

Teacher motivation was also explored through the lens of goal-setting theory (Latham et al. 1997) and goal-orientation theory (Butler, Shibaz 2008; Malmberg 2008), both sharing the assumption that «goals provide people with a sense of purpose» (Latham et al. 1997, p. 138). The peculiarity of goals is that they affect direction, arousal and duration of an action and these are exactly the same elements motivation is concerned with (Latham et al. 1997). In particular, as regards the relationship between teacher and students, Woolfolk Hoy affirmed that teachers «need to understand how their own goals and motivations affect their well-being and the lives of their students» (Woolfolk Hoy, 2008 p. 496).

Deci et al. (1997), Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Kunter et al. (2008) investigated the field of teacher motivation by means of self-determination theory. Self-determination theory explores the link between a) the teacher's internal drives b) his/her practice and c) the instructional context where s/he operates. Context provides choice, informative feedback and the possibility to establish relationships with both colleagues and students. In this respect, Deci et al. claimed that «substantial research indicates that when professors have the opportunity to feel autonomous, competent and related, they will be able to assimilate their experiences [in context] and express them in stimulating ways» (Deci et al. 1997, p. 69). In a similar vein, stressing the role of the teacher's involvement in his/her classroom practice, Csikszentmihalyi talked about «flow experience» (Csikszentmihalyi 1997), a deep involvement in teaching, activity for which the teacher shows commitment and passion and where intrinsic motivation is both the instrument *and* the product of the teacher's practice. Of this same opinion were Sheidecker and Freeman when affirming that the real reward for motivated teachers is not on pay-day but «when their passion is caught by the students» (Sheidecker, Freeman 1999, in Dörnyei, 2001 p. 27).

Considering the field of applied linguistics, the first relevant work on teacher motivation was that of Pennington and her students (for a review, see Kassagby et al. 2001, p. 214), who dealt with the topic of teacher motivation through the perspective of *job satisfaction* in ESL. Pennington found that language teachers were demotivated primarily because of high stress, lack of autonomy, too little resources to rely upon and poor work incentives

(Pennington 1995). Years later, Doyle and Kim conducted an investigation focusing on three major themes: intrinsic motivation; factors leading to dissatisfaction; mandated curricula and tests. They found that there were a lot of commonalities between the two sets of the sample considered (i.e. American teachers, Korean teachers) (Doyle, Kim 1999, in Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). Shoaib inquired into the motivation of language teachers in Saudi Arabia, configuring her research as a large-scale interview study. Three levels were identified, into which changes should be made to enhance motivation: the teacher level; the managerial level; the ministeral/institutional level (Shoaib 2004, in Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011). Baleghizadeh and Gordani (2012) explored the relationship between teacher motivation and quality of work life among secondary high school EFL teachers in Tehran. Building on Walton's work on quality of work life (Walton 1973, in Baleghizadeh, Gordani 2012) - according to which the construct is composed of motivation, performance and job satisfaction - the researchers found that teacher motivation was significantly correlated with four quality of work life variables, namely work conditions, chance of growth and security, social integration and use and development of their capacities. The most recent studies on EFL teacher motivation are those by Kubanyiova (2009, 2012) which belong to the field of language teacher cognition research. She found that the fact that language teachers behave differently from each other is the product of the «unobservable dimension» (Borg 2003) of the teachers' cognitions as regards the language taught, their beliefs about how to teach it, the specific context where they work, the students with whom they deal with and, more importantly, the teachers themselves. Kubanyiova's research lets emerge the fact that the teachers' *vision* of themselves in the future acts as a major incentive to grow as motivated professionals.

Among all these contributions discussing the role of teacher motivation, there are also studies focusing primarily on teacher *demotivational* factors (Kızıltepe 2008; Sugino 2010). In particular, Kızıltepe conducted a research among university teachers in a public university in Istanbul, Turkey, investigating the sources of motivation and demotivation among them. He found that students are both the main source of motivation and demotivation for teachers (Kızıltepe 2008). Of a similar opinion is Sugino who inquired into the sources of demotivation among language teachers in Japanese colleges and found that the highest responsibility for teacher demotivation is that of student attitudes (Sugino 2010). Summarizing the findings of research in the field of language teacher motivation, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) affirm that there are not less than five demotivating factors that undermine motivation: stressful nature of the job, inhibition of teacher autonomy (because of set curricula, standardized tests, etc.), insufficient self-efficacy as a cause of lack of proper training, limited potential for intellectual growth, unsatisfactory career and poor economic

conditions. Yet, the two scholars claim that teacher motivation is strongly amplified by *intrinsic* motives (i.e. love for the subject taught) reason for which, however, it is difficult to consider teaching a «profession» (Bess 1997, p. 431) because in today's society *extrinsic* results count more.

These three components of the 'hidden side' of teaching, i.e. cognition, affect and motivation, interact with each other and with the 'social side' of teaching, i.e. the surrounding people and context,<sup>5</sup> through the practice of *reflection*. The teacher as «reflective practitioner» (Schön 1983, in Williams, Burden 1997) makes use of reflection both *during* the lesson (reflection *in action*) and *after* the lesson (reflection *on action*) in order to explore (and learn from) the interactions between his/her expectations, what s/he did during the lesson and the subsequent results, i.e. the learners' reactions to the lesson, his/her feelings associated to both the lesson and the learners, the learners' successes and/or failures, etc. Reflective practitioners are quality teachers: «when teachers are encouraged to reflect critically on their practice, the quality of their teaching improves dramatically» (Gomez, Tabachnik 1992, in Knezevic, Scholl 1996, p. 81) because, through critical reflection, they gain higher control over the teaching/learning situation. Freeman considers the use of reflection so important that, according to him, the main aim of teacher education should be that of reflecting upon experience in order to understand it (Freeman, 2002). Therefore, reflection is not only a means through which a teacher could improve the quality of his/her teaching, but also a way to understand experience and learn from it.

#### 4 Conclusion

As Sealey and Carter summarise, «motivation is [...] not conceptualised as an individual difference characteristic, but as emergent from relations between *human intentionality* and *social structure*» (Sealey, Carter 2004, in Ushioda 2009, p. 221, emphasis added), thus stressing the interrelationship between an inner, psychological element - i.e. human intentionality - and the social, outer environment - i.e. social structure.

In line with this statement, two major points emerged from the literature hitherto reviewed. First of all, we have seen that language teaching is both a *cognitive* and a *social* phenomenon and, as such, it has an inner, 'hidden side' and an outer, 'social side'. Secondly, if our aim is to conduct a thorough investigation of language teacher motivation, we should take into consideration 1. the influences of the other components of the 'hidden side', cognition and affect, and 2. the impact of the 'social side' as well,

5 Kwo affirms «conditions for reflective teaching include the entire environment and the persons associated with it» (Kwo 1996, p. 314)

represented by instructional context - i.e. the teacher's relationship with students above all - and culture in general.<sup>6</sup>

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6 One of the main findings in a study by Cheng, Warden, Chang (2005) was the fundamental role of cultural context. Indeed, different cultures provide for different motivators or, in other words, motivators that are valid in one culture may not be valid in another (in this specific case, Western vs. Eastern cultures).

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