Examining the role of motivation in an interactive task

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Although learner motivation is believed to be a antecedent factor of successful language learning, little research has been done on how motivation affects language learners’ engagement with language learning tasks. It has been argued that motivation during an interactive task is a co-construct; that the interlocutors’ motivation levels play a significant role in successful communication. This study is an investigation of the influence of language learners’ motivation on their behavior during an interactive task. A total of 70 Japanese college students participated in this study. The students were randomly assigned a partner. Each pair of students engaged in a decision-making task via an online chatroom. The task required the learners to discuss and decide on a limited number of things that would be the most useful to have if stranded on a deserted island. Likert scale and open-ended questionnaires were administered to measure these learners’ motivational variables during the task. Learners’ on-task behavior was quantified both by counting the number of turns of each learner in the discussion and by measuring how much effort the learners spent on the task in the questionnaire. The result of a correlation analysis showed that intrinsic motivation and perceived competence during the task were relatively strongly associated with both turn-taking and effort expenditure. Following this, learners’ task engagement and their interlocutor’s motivational variables were examined, however no significant correlations were found. The detailed analysis using cluster analysis showed that regardless of whom learners are paired with, the interlocutor’s motivation does not have a significant, direct impact on a given student’s on-task behavior. Learner comments implied that as their interlocutors become motivated, students tended to feel pressured. This study concludes that for successful communication in an interactive task, interlocutors’ motivational disposition is less important than one’s own motivational disposition.

Keywords: Task, Motivation, Individual difference.