

## CHAPTER 3

# Too Much Psychology? The Role of the Social in Language Learning Motivation

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### Introduction

Motivation research in language learning has leaned heavily on psychology. Although psychology has played a major role in shaping our understandings of motivation in the learning of additional languages, I argue here that social theories, and in particular, the contributions of sociology of language in all its forms and extensions, have much to offer the study of motivation in language learning.

Zoltán Dörnyei has reminded us that research on learners' motivations to become bilingual made a big leap forward when Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1959) added a social dimension to motivational psychology and introduced the concept of “integrative motivation” (Dörnyei, 2019a). Much research on motivation in the learning of a second language has been based on Gardner's (1985, 1988) socio-educational model of second language acquisition, characterized as “the combination of *effort plus desire* to achieve the goal of learning the language plus *favourable attitudes* toward learning the language” (1985, my emphasis, p. 10). Gardner eventually expanded understandings of motivation in language learning to other factors beyond instrumental and integrative purposes, such as persistence and attention (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). However, motivational research on language

learning has been deeply influenced by the socio-psychological work of Gardner, most often focused on individual effort, desire, and positive attitudes to integrate into another language group. Wallace Lambert (1969) referred to this positive attitude in motivation as the “adoption of aspects of behavior which characterize *another linguistic-cultural group*” (p. 95). More recently Noels and her colleagues (Noels et al., 2001, 2008) have advanced a motivational orientation framework in terms of the degree to which it is perceived as freely chosen and self-determined.

Motivational research in *language learning* is deeply tied to *language teaching*, since teachers’ pedagogical practices are expected to engage students’ motivation. In studying the role of motivation in task completion, Dörnyei (2019b) has gone *beyond* motivation as simply socio-educational or cognitive-situated. He has proposed that there is an interaction of learner-specific factors, learning situational factors, task-related factors, and external factors such as distractions, disruptions, and time-related. An adequate language learning task promotes what Dörnyei, Henry and Muir (2016) call directed motivational currents. This includes having a vision or goal, a sense of ownership, the skills required, behavioral routines, concrete subgoals, regular progress checks, and affirmative feedback. It is not that the social has not been included in psychological motivation research; it is that the social continues to be defined as the context of the learner, their “social milieu” without taking into account past histories of colonization and conquest, socioeconomic structures, and ideologies of racism, linguisticism, and sexism.

Taking up Dörnyei’s (2016) call for an explicit/implicit *cooperation* in studying motivation, I try here to highlight the importance of the social in language learning. I focus on how bilingual learners think, feel, and behave, and its relationship to not just internal psychological motivation, but also to external socioeconomic and sociopolitical structures that interact and cooperate with internal psychological processes (see also Poehner, this volume). I show how the personality/identity of the language learners has to do not only with aptitude and internal motivation, or even with vision and goals, but with how the learner as a subject is positioned in society. I claim that without attention to how sociopolitical structures and ideologies obstruct the desire and positive attitudes of learners, their self-determination, and their vision of a process, this work positions learners as if they were passive individual agents without histories or circumstances.

I address in this chapter why it is that the psychological study of motivation in language learning leaves out what the Portuguese philosopher Boaventura de Sousa Santos has referred to as knowledge systems from “the other side of the line” (Santos, 2007, 2009, 2014). I first describe here how the study of language and society took up bilingualism and in so doing made us aware of language learners on that other side of the line, first relegated to a separate colonial territory, and today found in the metropolis itself. Yet, by continuing to impose systems of knowledge that emerged from the

metropolis to produce colonial conditions, schools and language educators continued to view racialized bilingual learners through *absences*, through what they are said *not to have*—standard language, bilingual ability, and motivation to meet educational standards and to become what is established as being bilingual. I argue here that it is not just the social that we have to bring into the study of motivation, but it is *another view of the social*, one that sheds the hegemonic eye with which language scholars have viewed these learners, and *re-views* them through the copresence of an ecology of knowledges working in cooperation toward *emergence* of new meanings and possibilities (Santos, 2007).

## Contributions of Sociology of Language

The study of language and society does not start or end with Joshua A. Fishman, but his foundational work on sociology of language in the 1960s ensured that bilingual speakers and bilingual learners were always positioned socially within groups, communities, and nation-states. The study of bilinguals' beliefs and attitudes toward ethnolinguistic groups and language learning was then always related to the beliefs and attitudes of those with whom they interacted, where they interacted, when, and how (Fishman, 1965, 1968, 1972).

Like Gardner, Lambert, and Dörnyei, Joshua A. Fishman was a social psychologist, and he taught until his retirement on the faculty of a graduate school of psychology. But his scholarship on language and bilingualism never reduced language learners or language activists—two of his most studied groups of people—to purely psychological beings. Instead, he studied how their language learning and language activism was marked by their social affiliations—linguistic, ethnic, historical, economic, national. The individual language user and learner was never seen as divorced from its community and group—a community laden with differential political and economic power, numerical size, degree of bias, and sociohistorical considerations. The language users' and learners' sense of selves, their emotions and affect, their self-regulation could not be understood, Fishman argued, unless these individuals were positioned within a social structure, with its historical and present conditions. Language was seen by Fishman (1968) as structuring the social context in ways that make it possible to identify the origins of inequality among speakers. Fishman argued that learning or not learning an additional language has more to do with how language functions to structure hierarchies of social groups within society, than with psychological motivation.

Before the 1960s, the research on language education was dominated by the learning of European languages by speakers of other European prestigious languages, especially French, English, German, Italian, and sometimes Spanish. The invisibility of any power dimension in learning

language meant that researchers were able to study motivation as a mostly psychological phenomenon. This, however, started to change as different groups came into view.

Sociolinguistics was developed in the 1960s as language scholars could no longer ignore the multilingual realities and the colonial conditions of the many African and Asian people in countries that were achieving independence, as well as the many autochthonous and indigenous peoples who clamored for their language rights. Joshua Fishman's sociolinguistic work emphasized bilingual groups that had been minoritized. For example, he titled his collection of essays from a lifetime of work, *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (1989). This renewed emphasis on the study of minoritized bilingual and multilingual users and how they languaged bilingually meant that traditional language teaching and language learning, as in "foreign" language classrooms, were no longer appropriate.

In the colonies throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, only selected few colonized multilingual speakers had been taught European languages, always with traditional pedagogical practices used in the empire to teach "foreign languages." After independence, these same ways of teaching and learning were adopted, now to teach people for whom the language used as medium of instruction was not "foreign," but constructed as "national" or "official" *for all*. In what was accepted as an important part of the field of language planning and policy that was emerging as part of the sociolinguistics of the time (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971), "acquisition planning" (Cooper, 1989), that is, planning for the acquisition of a chosen national language, became important. In order for all to learn the language selected as "national" or "official," often a colonial language or the language of the dominant majority, that language had to be used as medium of instruction. The adoption of mostly transitional bilingual education programs in some localities disrupted some of the policies and practices of "foreign" language programs, but, traditional theories of language learning and teaching continued uninterrupted. This was so, even though these theories were based on experience with monolinguals, now being imposed on minoritized bilingual and multilingual subjects.

When Gardner and Lambert (1959) recognized motivation to learn an additional language not just as instrumental, but also as integrationist, they were responding not just to shifts in psychological understandings, but rather to how the social movements of the time—those of independence of new countries in Africa and Asia, but also, the ethnic revival and civil rights movements affecting the globe—were shaping those who were language learners. Most language learners now needed a "second language" not just for individual instrumental purposes as was the case in the learning of "foreign languages," but because it was the dominant language in a society that had colonized them. Yet, the burden for language learning continued to be placed on speakers, on their motivation and their choice to integrate, without considering how the colonizers constrained the language choices



and self-determination of subaltern subjects. The learning of the “new” language was now to be subtractive (Lambert, 1974), always accompanied by having to forget their own language practices, as well as the history of conquest, suffering, and genocide that accompanied these efforts.

In time, people with colonial status started to move to the metropolis in great numbers, establishing communities that often lived side-by-side with other racialized autochthonous and indigenous people of the region. There were now more people that needed to be taught a dominant language, although just as a “second” language. On the other hand, a neoliberal economy that facilitated movement and migration, but not equity in living conditions and job and educational opportunities, made visible the inequities in the teaching of those languages. We address next how these sociopolitical changes have also expanded our views of the study of language in society. In so doing, we reflect on how critical post-structuralist sociolinguistic positions today can cooperate with motivational studies on language learning and teaching in this neoliberal era.

## Language and Society in the Twenty-first Century

As people started to cross the colonial line that had rendered them invisible “on the other side,” it became more difficult to ignore and not “see” these bilingual and multilingual learners. These were not sequential learners motivated by instrumental or even integrative needs. Many were simultaneous bilinguals, born into communities with other language practices, where their only way of being and doing language was bi-/multilingual, despite a school system that insisted on teaching them a second language at the expense of their home language practices.

The physical and material exploitation of subaltern subjects in colonial contexts was substituted by the discursive production of colonial subjects as inferior, and their knowledge systems, including their language, as being flawed and corrupted. The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) has called this process *coloniality*, arguing that race and racism became the organizing principle that structured all the hierarchies of people into superior and inferior. Sociolinguists started contesting the production of inferior subjectivities and knowledge through language. In interaction with social theories of postcolonial and decolonial thinkers, sociolinguists began identifying what Foucault (1980) called “technologies of power.” These were used in *normalization processes* that led people to accept what society and its institutions, and in particular schools, defined as language, bilingualism, language learning, and language teaching, in ways that benefitted monolingual dominant language users. A most important technology of power has been ideologies. Ideologies explain why it has

been so easy for people to have naturalized understandings of language and bilingualism in ways that benefit monolingual white speakers and that leaves racialized bilinguals without motivation to learn the language of the dominant majority. The study of ideologies in language learning has helped shift the focus from how bilingual *speakers* do language to how white monolingual *listening subjects* construct these marginalized bilingual users, ushering in the study of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). We address below first the changing understandings of language, bilingualism, and language learning and teaching, and the consequences of these new insights for studies of motivation. We then explore language ideologies and the shift in focus from motivating language learners to motivating other listeners.

### ***Language, Bilingualism, and Language Learning***

The fields of language learning and of motivational studies of language learning have always relied on the concept of language as a named autonomous structure. Students are said to learn named entities—English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and so on. But the question for critical poststructuralist sociolinguists in this neoliberal era (García, Flores & Spotti, 2017) has been: *What is language and whose vision of language does the language learning profession uphold, and why?* We attempt here to answer this question and propose another view of language, bilingualism, and language learning and teaching that has much relevance for psychological studies of motivation.

Bauman and Briggs (2003) have documented how language was invented by European elites as “reductionist, atomistic, and individualistic” and how this “then became a model not just of communication but of thought, rationality, and sociability” (p. 299). That is, those who were said to have these discrete European languages were then said to be rational, intelligent, and socially valuable. Sinfree Makoni’s and Alistair Pennycook’s *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* (2007) also reminded us how “named languages” in colonial contexts were invented by missionaries and linguists and had little to do with the language practices of people themselves, with their *linguaging* (Becker, 1995; Maturana & Varela, 1984).

The bilingualism of racialized speakers is different from the notions of bilingualism that have been constructed with sequential white dominant bilingual learners when students were similar in terms of social, economic, historical, and geographic position. The acquisition of bilingualism by minoritized speakers could not be simply additive, with one named entity being added separately to another named language (Lambert, 1974). Instead, their bilingualism has been said to be dynamic (García, 2009). That is, these bilinguals engage in what many sociolinguists and applied linguists have called *translanguaging* (García & Li Wei, 2014). Translanguaging theory poses that bilinguals do not “have” two separate languages with their own

grammatical systems and psycholinguistic reality; bilinguals “do” language with a unitary repertoire from which they select features to make meaning and communicate (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015, 2019). This unitary repertoire goes beyond the purely linguistic, integrating other modes, all interacting to engage and motivate learners (Hua, Li, & Jankowicz-Pytel, 2020; Lin, 2019; Li, 2011, 2017; Li & Lin, 2019). Bilingual learners leverage their entire meaning-making repertoire as they learn, and effective language teachers must enable them to be active agents assembling their full repertoire in the process of learning (Pennycook, 2017). Even if the product or task is said to be in a “named language” or a mode that has been selected by the teacher, the *process of learning* must engage bilingual students’ translanguaging (García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017). García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) call this the translanguaging corriente, which is always present with bilingual learners. For example, if reading, bilingual learners must be encouraged to bring all of themselves into the text to make meaning of the text. This means motivating students to leverage their translanguaging, and freeing up other knowledge and language systems, other than that of the text (García, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2019). Dörnyei’s motivational current has to engage with the translanguaging corriente.

But this bilingual languaging, this translanguaging, is often not part of what teachers are encouraged to leverage in teaching languages or in motivating learners of languages. Instead, teachers insist that only one language, constructed as the “standard” by dominant monolingual and bilingual speakers, is used. These minoritized learners are often told to “forget” their language, to think only in the “school” language, to “leave their language behind.” In the rare instances in which these racialized bilingual learners are engaged in bilingual education, they are taught as if they were two monolinguals in one (Grosjean, 1982), insisting on developing parallel bilingualisms (Heller, 1999) in ways that do not in any way fit their bilingual lives and their language practices as people.

The notion of language and bilingualism that is upheld in education strictly benefits dominant white majority speakers, leaving little room for bilingual learners’ practices. As we think about how sociolinguists and psychologists can cooperate in motivational research, it is important to understand that translanguaging pedagogical practices do little to transform learners if they remain apolitical, as Flores (2014) has warned. It is not enough to just transform our understandings of language, bilingualism, and language learning to motivate language learning; we also need to motivate and transform *listeners* and their *ideologies*.

### ***Listeners and Ideologies***

Racialized bilingual learners, especially those who have been deprived of rich educational opportunities, rarely do language in the same ways as

monolinguals. But these differences are not recognized as sociopolitically and socio-educationally produced, but are used to manufacture their enregisterment (Agha, 2005) as inadequate invalid people. Their language is said to be “non-standard,” full of “interferences,” exhibiting bilingual deviant phenomena such as “code-switching.” When these racialized bilingual learners are taught what has been constructed by dominant majorities to be the “standard,” their language practices are then produced as non-standard. Why would they be motivated to learn a language that is not theirs when that is precisely what produces their marginalization?

Scholars working on language ideologies (Silverstein, 1979) have shown how certain linguistic forms become associated with certain types of people through semiotic processes that construct social and linguistic categories (Irvine & Gal, 2000). Language is used to racialize, that is, to ascribe and prescribe a racial category to a group of people (Urciuoli, 2011). It is, after all, listening subjects that are authorized to legitimate or not the representations of speakers. The joint work of sociolinguists and anthropological linguists has advanced the concept of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017), focusing on how white monolingual listening subjects construct racialized bilinguals as having inappropriate language, even when they are producing what in the lips of others might be considered appropriate.

To break out of the coloniality of listening with dominant monolingual “ears,” Mignolo (2000, 2002) recommends adopting an ideology of “otherwise than” in order to rethink, reread and rewrite a world organized otherwise, conceptualized from the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2015). To do so would require adopting what Santos (2009, 2014) has called an “epistemology of the South.” For Santos, the South is not geographical, but stands as a metaphor of systemic and unjust human suffering caused by colonialism and global capitalism. Santos calls for going beyond what he calls abyssal thinking, an epistemological perspective from the side of the line of those who command and have a monopoly on knowledge. He encourages us to situate our epistemological perspective on the social experience of those on the other side of the line, enabling us to view and listen to the two sides of the line simultaneously, in the copresence of what he calls *post-abyssal thinking* (Santos, 2009). Ensuring the copresence of knowledge systems from both sides of the line would then also transform the ways in which we all listen, as we start to develop thinking and listening that is post-abyssal. It is in this post-abyssal space where motivational research on bilingualism must be situated in the future, as dominant listeners engage with minoritized bilingual learners. The question then would be: *How can we motivate listeners to overcome listening with white dominant monolingual knowledge? How can they listen in a space of copresence of people, knowledges, and languaging?* To attempt this would mean going beyond the psychological aspects of motivation to encompass how political and economic structures hinder or assist listeners in hearing, viewing, and thinking post-abyssally.

## Conclusion

The psychological study of motivation in language learning has viewed and listened to learners only from the side of the line of those who command and have a monopoly on the nature of knowledge and language. This renders other knowledge and linguistic practices as popular, not academic, not scientific, and these other learners as deficient, lazy, lacking, absent of potential. Incorporating social theory can open up the study of motivation so it does not view learners solely through a hegemonic eye, but from an ecology of presences, and not of absences.

Despite motivational studies being directed toward a future, its strong reliance on psychological factors has rendered many learners as not displaying the effort, desire, and attitudes that make good language learners. Motivational research on language learning has often focused on absences, of what learners do not have. We argue here for a type of motivational research in which psychology and social theory would cooperate in amplifying conceptions of language and bilingualism. In this way, motivational research might be able to uncover new constellations of meanings that include all speakers and all listeners as equals and copresent.

Social justice has been at the core of sociolinguistics since its emergence as a field in the 1960s, and as it has evolved in connection to anthropological linguistics. If motivational research in language learning is going to reclaim the important place it must have, it needs to nurture itself from the work of critical post-structuralist sociolinguists in order to counteract the social inequalities that have been produced by language ideologies that naturalize how power operates. I have argued here for language motivation research to center the role of language in producing social inequalities, and its interrelationship with other forms of social inequality such as race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation.

