The motivational basis of language learning tasks*

Zoltán Dornyei
University of Nottingham

Introduction

The study of *language learning tasks* offers a particularly fruitful research direction towards the understanding of how instructed second language acquisition (SLA) actually takes place. By focusing on tasks, researchers are able to break down the complex, prolonged learning process into discrete segments with well-defined boundaries, thereby creating researchable behavioural units that have a well-definable profile in terms of the L2 input/output and the language processing operations involved. Thus, tasks can be seen as primary instructional variables or building blocks of classroom learning, and for research purposes they can be used as "logical models that describe what students are doing in classrooms and the context of their actions" (Winne & Marx, 1989, p. 224). For this reason, during the past decade SLA research has paid increasing attention to the analysis of tasks, looking at them both from a theoretical (language processing) and a methodological (instructional design) perspective (e.g. Bygate, 1999; Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001, Crookes & Gass, 1993a, 1993b; Dornyei & Kormos, 2000; R.Ellis, 2000; Foster, 1998; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Long & Crookes, 1992; Robinson, 1995a, 2001a, 2001b; Skehan, 1998a, 1998b; Skehan & Foster, 1997, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Willis, 1996; Yule & Powers, 1994).

Taking tasks as the basic level of analysis is also a logical step in the study of motivation to learn a foreign/second language (L2). Traditionally, L2 motivation was examined in a broad sense, by focusing on the learners' overall and generalised disposition towards learning the L2, but the 1990's shifted the emphasis towards a more situated approach, with more and more studies

investigating how student motivation is reflected in concrete classroom events and processes (for a recent review, see Dornyei, 2001). While the former macro perspective is more relevant from a social psychological perspective as it allows researchers to characterise and compare the motivational pattern of whole learning communities and then to draw inferences about intercultural communication and affiliation, the latter micro perspective is more in line with an educational approach whereby the significance of motivation is seen in its explanatory power of why learners behave as they do in specific learning situations. This emerging new perspective of motivation has often been referred to as the 'situation-specific' approach (cf. Dornyei, 1996; Julkunen, 1989, 2001), and the study of *task motivation* can be seen in many ways as the culmination of this approach: motivation can hardly be examined in a more situated manner than within a task-based framework.

In the light of these considerations, the purpose of this paper is to examine the main characteristics of task motivation. As a preliminary, we should note that although the understanding of the motivational processes fuelling the quantity and quality of learners' on-task behaviour is highly relevant both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, motivational psychology in the past has not generated substantial research on the subject (for a valuable exception, see Winne & Marx, 1989). This paper will address one key aspect of task motivation, its *dynamic nature,* examining how motivation is shaped by various internal and external forces/conditions in an interactive and ongoing manner. I will argue that the actual degree of motivational force associated with an individual's specific on-task behaviour is the composite outcome of a number of distinct motivational influences, many of which are related to the various broader 'contexts' each task is surrounded with, such as:

- the language class the task takes place in;
- the language course the class is part of;
- the school that offers the language course; and
- the particular language that the course is targeting.

I believe that all these 'contexts' function as 'motivationalcontingencies' in that they have some bearing on the final task motivation. I will propose a process-oriented approach that is suited for an analysis of such dynamic relationships, and I will also present empirical data from a task-based classroom study that examined the motivational basis of L2 learners' task engagement.

Main aspects of task motivation

In order to study the motivational characteristics of instructional tasks, we first need a definition of what a 'task' is. In view of the conception proposed above whereby instructional tasks are discrete units of situated learning behaviours, the most important specification for a 'task' is the identification of its boundaries, that is, determining when a particular task starts and ends. For the purpose of this study I will conceive a learning task as a complex of various goal-oriented mental and behavioural operations that students perform during the period between the teacher's initial task instructions and the completion of the final task outcome[1]. Accordingly, learning tasks constitute the interface between educational goals, teacher and students.

Let us start the examination of task motivation by considering a basic distinction proposed by Tremblay, Goldberg and Gardner (1995), who distinguished *trait* and *state motivation,* the former involving stable and enduring dispositions, the latter transitory and temporary responses or conditions. The trait/state distinction has been applied in psychology with regard to a number of different individual difference variables (e.g. anxiety; cf. MacIntyre, 1999, this volume) and from the point of view of motivation this dichotomy makes good sense: It is highly likely that, when confronted with a particular task, a learner will be motivated both by generalised, task-independent factors (e.g. overall interest in the subject matter) and situation-specific, task-dependent factors (e.g. the challenging nature of the task). Task motivation would then be the composite of these two motivational sources (cf. Julkunen, 2001).

Although the trait/state approach is a possible way of conceptualising task motivation, its weakness is that it suggests a rather static conception. Instructional tasks involve a series of learner behaviours that can last for a considerable period (e.g. up to several hours) and it is unlikely that the learner's motivation during this period will remain constant. Thus, instead of assuming a simple and stable 'state motivation' component to account for the situation-specific aspect of task motivation, a more accurate characterisation may be provided by taking a *process-oriented approach* that, as the term suggests, looks at the dynamic motivational processes that take place during task completion. The validity of such a conception has received empirical confirmation in a recent study by MacIntyre, MacMaster and Baker (2001), who found a clear factor analytic distinction between what they termed "attitudinal motivation" (associated with Gardner's approach) and "action motivation" (associated with Kuhl's process-oriented *'action control'* approach — see below).

Motivation from a process-oriented perspective

A *process-oriented approach* attempts to account for the ongoing changes of motivation over time. Looking at it from this perspective, motivation is not seen as a static attribute but rather as a dynamic factor that displays continuous fluctuation, going through certain ebbs and flows. In 1998, István Otto and I attempted to draw up a process model that would describe this evolution (Dornyei & Otto, 1998), outlining how initial wishes and desires are first transformed into goals and then into operationalized intentions, and how these intentions are enacted, leading (hopefully) to the accomplishment of the goal and concluded by the final evaluation of the process. Drawing on the work of German psychologists Heinz Heckhausen and Julius Kuhl (e.g. Heckhausen, 1991; Heckhausen & Kuhl, 1985; Kuhl & Beckmann, 1994), we suggested that from a temporal perspective at least three distinct phases of the motivational process should be separated (see Figure 1, for a schematic representation):

- *Preactional stage:* First, motivation needs to be *generated* — the motivational dimension related to this initial phase can be referred to as *choice motivation,* because the generated motivation leads to the selection of the goal or task that the individual will pursue.

- *Actional stage:* Second, the generated motivation needs to be actively *maintained* and *protected* while the particular action lasts. This motivational dimension has been referred to as *executive motivation,* and it is particularly relevant to learning in classroom settings, where students are exposed to a great number of distracting influences, such as off-task thoughts, irrelevant distractions from others, anxiety about the tasks, or physical conditions that make it difficult to complete the task.

- *Postactional stage:* Finally, there is a third phase following the completion of the action — termed *motivational retrospection* — which concerns the learners' *retrospective evaluation* of how things went. The way students process their past experiences in this retrospective phase will determine the kind of activities they will be motivated to pursue in the future.

Because students are rarely in the position of choosing the tasks they would like to engage in, with regard to the understanding of task motivation it is the second, actional, stage that is of the greatest importance for us. According to a process-oriented conception, the learner enters this actional stage with a certain level of motivation (which can be called the 'instigation force'), but very soon a new set of motivational influences — associated with the immediate learning
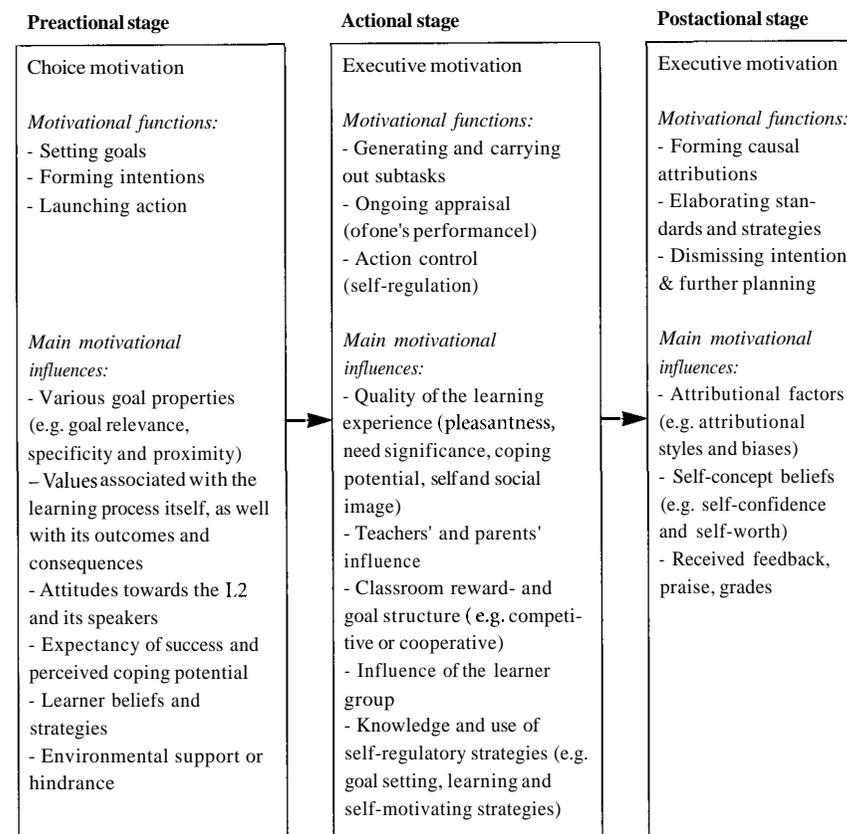
Preactional stage	Actional stage	Postactional stage
Choice motivation	Executive motivation	Executive motivation
Motivational functions: - Setting goals - Forming intentions - Launching action	*Motivational functions:* - Generating and carrying out subtasks - Ongoing appraisal (of one's performance) - Action control (self-regulation)	*Motivational functions:* - Forming causal attributions - Elaborating standards and strategies - Dismissing intention & further planning
Main motivational influences: - Various goal properties (e.g. goal relevance, specificity and proximity) – Values associated with the learning process itself, as well with its outcomes and consequences - Attitudes towards the L2 and its speakers - Expectancy of success and perceived coping potential - Learner beliefs and strategies - Environmental support or hindrance	*Main motivational influences:* - Quality of the learning experience (pleasantness, need significance, coping potential, self and social image) - Teachers' and parents' influence - Classroom reward- and goal structure (e.g. competitive or cooperative) - Influence of the learner group - Knowledge and use of self-regulatory strategies (e.g. goal setting, learning and self-motivating strategies)	*Main motivational influences:* - Attributional factors (e.g. attributional styles and biases) - Self-concept beliefs (e.g. self-confidence and self-worth) - Received feedback, praise, grades

Figure 1. A process model of learning motivation in the L2 classroom

situation — come into force, and a complex process of 'motivational processing' commences (Winne & Marx, 1989). This involves two interrelated submechanisms: *ongoing appraisal* and *action control.* While learners are engaged in a task, they continuously *appraise* the multitude of stimuli coming from the environment and the progress they have made towards the action outcome, comparing actual performances with predicted ones or with ones that alternative action sequences would offer. This appraisal process is closely linked with a second mechanism, *action control,* which refers to "knowledge and strategies used to manage cognitive and noncognitive resources for goal attainment" (Corno & Kanfer, 1993, p. 304). That is, action control processes denote self-regulatory processes that are called into force in order to enhance, scaffold or protect learning-specific action; active use of such mechanisms may 'save' the action when ongoing monitoring reveals that progress is slowing, halting or backsliding.

'Motivational processing', then, is seen as the interplay of the appraisal and the action control systems. Following Winne and Marx's (1989) reasoning, negative signals from the appraisal system may trigger the need to activate action control strategies, and if appropriate schemata are available, certain mental or behavioural adjustments are made and the motivational level necessary for sustaining action is restored. The effective operation of executive motivational processing is, therefore, the function of the learner's willingness to activate action control mechanisms and the availability of these (cf. Dornyei, 2001, for more detail).

In a recent paper (Dornyei, 2000), I have concluded that the main strength of a process-oriented approach with regard to the understanding of student motivation is that it makes it possible to interpret and integrate the manifold motivational factors that affect the student's learning behaviour in classroom settings. Using *time* as an organising principle provides a natural way of ordering the relevant motivational influences into various distinct stages of the motivational sequence along a temporal axis. However, one problematic aspect of such an approach is that it implies that the actional process in question is well-definable and occurs in relative isolation, without any interference from other ongoing activities the learner is engaged in. Regrettably, this is rarely true in the strict sense. Where exactly does 'action' start in an educational context? Consider, for example first-year college students: Where would be the borderline between pre-action and action in their case? At the point when they decides to study in higher education? Or enrol in a particular university? Or select the specific courses they will take? Or attend a particular class? Or engage in a particular activity within this class?

It seems logical to assume that taking all these steps will result in somewhat different, increasingly action-oriented contingencies or 'mind sets' in the students. This, however, means that the 'choice' phase of one actional step might happen simultaneously with the executive phase of another, resulting in complex interferences: For example, a British secondary school pupil is in the actional/executive stage of learning in the sense that he/she is actively attending school and trying to meet various curricular requirements, but at the same time he/she may still be in the preactional/choice phase in the sense that he/she may still be contemplating which 'A' level courses to take for specialisation.

Although I believe that the conception of task motivation as a complex of motivational influences associated with various levels of action-oriented contingencies or mind sets provides a more elaborate description than that offered by the trait/state approach, this conception is still incomplete if it does

not take into account the *dynamic nature* of motivational processing. It is very likely that the various motivational influences *interact* with each other; for example, certain general orientations (such as an instrumental orientation) may cause the learner to perceive or responded to certain situation-specific motivational features differently from the perceptions/reactions associated with other orientations. In other words, an IF-THEN contingency can occur whereby motives of different levels of generalisation activate each other. Indeed, it is not difficult to find evidence for such IF-THEN contingencies in the L2 motivation literature. For example, in a study conducted by Noels, Clement and Pelletier (1999) focusing on the motivational impact of the language teacher's communicative/instructional style, the researchers have found that — quite logically — the degree of the teachers' support of student autonomy and the amount of informative feedback they provided were in a direct positive relationship with the students' sense of self-determination (autonomy) and enjoyment. However, this directive influence did not reach significance with students who pursued learning primarily for extrinsic (instrumental) reasons, which indicated that those learners who studied a language primarily because they had to were less sensitive to this aspect of teacher influence than those who did it of their own free will.

In my own research, in a study conducted together with Judit Kormos (Dornyei & Kormos, 2000) we found that students with a more positive versus a more negative attitude towards a particular task displayed significant differences from each other in a number of respects. Their linguistic self-confidence only affected their task engagement among students with a positive attitude towards the task, and social factors such as the learners' social status (i.e. social standing/position in class) affected task engagement positively amongst students with positive and negatively amongst students with negative task attitudes. In addition, when we changed the language of the tasks from English as a second language to the students' mother tongue (L1), we obtained a strikingly different motivational pattern, with several significant *negative* correlations emerging between motivational variables and task engagement factors: in the L1 version learners who did not particularly like the English classes and did not see much point in learning English in general appeared to be more active than their motivated peers. These findings suggested to us that the predictor variables of task performance constituted a complex, multi-level and hierarchical construct.

Research question and design

The study reported in this paper is a follow-up to the Dornyei and Kormos (2000) investigation and uses data from the same large-scale British-Hungarian research project conducted together with Martin Bygate (University of Leeds) and Anita Csölle, Dorottya Holló, Krisztina Károly and Nora Németh (all from Eötvös University Budapest). The research objective was to examine a yet uncharted aspect of motivational processing, the motivational impact of the fellow-participant in a task. It has been suggested by several scholars in the past that peer influences constitute an important motivational factor (for a review, see Dornyei, 2001), but I am not aware of any concrete research that would have examined this relationship in actual terms. Thus, the main research question of this study is to examine the extent to which task motivation is *co-constructed,* that is, shaped by the dynamic interplay of the task participants' motivation.

The design of this study was relatively straightforward: Following a correlational research design, a number of individual difference (mainly motivational) and language variables were identified and assessed, and then correlations were computed between them. The language variables were objective measures of the participants' actual language output in a communicative language task (performed in dyads): the *size of speech* produced (measured by the number of words) and the *number of turns* the participants' exchange comprised. These were taken as an index of the learners' *task engagement,* which is a central issue in instructed SLA because it is a prerequisite to any language processing to take place; to put it broadly, if students are not actively involved in the instructional tasks and do not produce a certain amount of language output, L2 learning is unlikely to be effective in developing communicative skills. Therefore, all the cognitive and linguistic processes discussed in the L2 task literature depend, to some extent, on this initial condition. This importance attached to task engagement is consistent with findings in educational psychology; as Winne and Marx (1989, p. 225) summarise:

> In order to promote, facilitate, or develop students' knowledge and skills in any subject, contemporary research about learning converges on at least one clear prescription: Teachers must arrange for students to engage in cognitive activities in which they manipulate and transform information.

The individual difference variables included various attitudinal/motivational measures related to learning English in general and to the language course the students were attending in particular. Because the language measures concerned the quantity of the speech produced by the participants, one further individual difference variable was added to the research paradigm, the learners' 'willingness to communicate' (WTC) in the L1, which refers to the person's general readiness to enter into discourse. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1987), WTC is a personality trait that is responsible for the "regularity in the amount of communication behaviour of an individual across situations" (p. 138) and it is related to a number of enduring personality variables such as introversion/extroversion, self-esteem and communication apprehension (for more details, see MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1998, who conceptualised WTC in the L2 to be an important language learning variable).

In order to assess participant effects, I correlated the interlocutor's predictor and the speaker's criterion variables, that is, looked at the association between an individual's language output and his/her interlocutor's motivational disposition. Finally, correlations were also computed between the motivational and language measures with the dyads as the basic units of analysis, that is, with the communication partners' scores pooled.

Method

Participants

The participants of the investigation were 44 Hungarian students (aged 16-17) studying English at an intermediate level in 5 classes in 2 Budapest secondary schools. The two schools were of the same type, "gimnázium" (similar to the former British grammar schools), providing general instruction and preparing students for further studies in higher education. The English curriculum involved teaching integrated skills with an emphasis on developing communicative competence and students in all five groups used coursebooks published in Great Britain. The group sizes ranged from 12–16 (but not every student participating in the large-scale longitudinal project was present when the data reported here were gathered).

Task

The task used is the study was an *oral argumentative task.* This task was designed as an interactive problem-solving activity, aimed at eliciting arguments concerning everyday school matters (see Appendix). Students (working in pairs) were given a list of items and they were asked to select and rank-order

some of these individually, based on an imaginary situation. Following this, they were to compare with their partners their preferences and come to a compromise by means of a negotiation process.

Data collection and processing

All the data collection for the study was carried out during the students' regular English classes. The students' performance on the research task was recorded and then transcribed. As mentioned above, we used two measures to describe the quantity of learner engagement, the *speech size* measured by the number of words produced and the *number of turns* generated by the participants. This second measure was included because it was assumed that the successful completion of a problem-solving, negotiation-based task such as the one we had used would require a considerable amount of turn-taking to take place. In contrast, a hasty and unmotivated solution in which no real arguments or attempts at persuading the interlocutor are involved can be achieved by using very few turns. Therefore, the number of turns used by a speaker can be seen as an indicator of the level of student involvement. We must note that there is a difference between the two language measures in that the number of turns depends more directly on the quality of the joint interaction than the number of words does. For example, if the interaction itself is not very productive but one person offers lengthy monologues, this will result in a high word count but a low turn number on his/her part. Indeed, turn number is a function of the interlocutor's active contribution, since in turn-taking the number of turns produced by the two speakers is by definition roughly equal.

Students also filled in a *self-report questionnaire,* which focused on various attitudinal/motivational issues, based on Clement, Dornyei & Noels's (1994) instrument specifically developed for Hungarian learners. The data from the questionnaire were computer coded and the number of variables was reduced by computing six multi-item scales (summarised below) by summing the thematically corresponding items. As mentioned before, a seventh background variable was added to these six scales, the learners' *willingness to communicate* (WTC) in their L1, in order to account for their general communication orientation. This scale was obtained by another self-report questionnaire and the actual items used in our study were adapted from an instrument developed by the originators of the construct, McCroskey and Richmond (1991).

Because there was considerable between-group variation in the learners' language output (recall that the learners came from five class groups in two

schools), we computed standard scores within each class for both the motivational and language variables and used these rather than the raw scores for the computations. This involved mathematically converting the distribution of the scores within each class sample in a way that the mean was 0 and the standard deviation 1, which is an established statistical method for compensating for within-sample differences before pooling the data from various subgroups (see Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985).

Variables in the study

The following list summarises the seven individual difference variables used in the study, with their description, the number of items they were made up of and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient for each scale. The mean Cronbach Alpha coefficient across the six attitudinal/motivational scales is .76, which is adequate for such scales. The coefficient for WTC is lower because the scale deliberately sampled responses concerning different social situations[2].

- *Integrativeness*   A broad positive disposition towards the L2 speaker community, including an interest in their life and culture and a desire for contact with them (7 items, Cronbach a = .80)

- *Incentive values of*   A broad factor associated with the various benefits —
  English proficiency   pragmatic and L2 use-related — of L2 proficiency; e.g. "Learning English is important for me because I may need English in the future (work, further education)" (8 items, Cronbach a = .80)

- *Attitudes towards*   E.g. "I like the English classes"; "I wish we had more
  the English course   English classes at school" and "The things we learn in the English classes will be useful in the future" (3, .83)

- *Linguistic self-*   Factor associated with a favourable self-conception
  confidence   of language aptitude, a satisfaction with progress and a belief in one's ability to succeed in L2 learning; e.g. "I am sure I'll be able to learn English" (6 items, Cronbach a — .76)

- *Language use*   Anxiety experienced while using the L2; e.g. "I usually
  anxiety   feel ill at ease when I have to speak English" and "I often become uncertain when I have to speak in the English classes" (2 items, Cronbach a = .73)

- *Task attitudes*   E.g. "I have found the tasks used in the project useful

- *Willingness to communicate*

for L2 learning" and "I liked the tasks used in the project" (2 items, Cronbach a = .61)

(WTC) The learners' readiness to enter into discourse with people in different social situations; e.g. "Standing in the bus stop with friends" (5 items, Cronbach a = .48; see also Note 2)

Results and discussion

Correlations between task attitudes and the other individual difference measures

Let us first look at the correlations between task attitudes and the other individual difference measures (see Table 1). Of the five correlations with motivational variables three are significant, indicating that — in accordance with Tremblay et al.'s (1995) and Julkunen's (2001) claims — the appraisal of the specific task was related to more general motivational variables. The strong correlation with *Course attitudes* was expected because task and course attitudes both concern classroom learning in a situated manner, and the significant correlation with *Integrativeness* is consistent with Gardner's (1985) theory (see MacIntyre, this volume) as well as past findings in Hungarian student samples (e.g. Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1994; Dornyei & Clement, 2001). The positive association with *L2 use anxiety* is somewhat unexpected; it indicates that those learners who take the task more seriously experience more nervousness about speaking in the L2. Recent research by Dewaele (in press; Dewaele & Furnham, 2000) suggests that certain personality variables (e.g. psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism) are directly related to the

Table 1. Correlations between 'Task attitudes' and the other individual difference variables

	Task attitudes
Integrativeness	.40**
Incentive values	.26
Course attitudes	.58***
Self-confidence	.07
L2 use anxiety	.37*
WTC	.21

* = $p<.05$; ** = $p<.01$; *** = $p<.001$

amount of language anxiety one experiences. We can speculate that the same personality variables might also affect one's attitudes towards a communicative task, which then would imply that the association between L2 anxiety and task attitudes is due to mediating personality effects. With regard to WTC, the non-significant correlation indicates that there is no evidence of a relationship between the learners' attitude towards the communicative task used in the study and their WTC orientation.

Correlations between the motivational and language variables

Table 2 presents the correlations between the seven individual difference and two language variables. The table reveals significant positive correlations between the language variables and the two most situation-specific variables, *Course attitudes* and *Task attitudes,* and presents a further significant correlation between *Self-confidence* and speech size. As the multiple correlations show, the motivational variables together explain roughly 35-40 per cent of the variance in the language measures. Although the overall magnitude of the coefficients in Table 2 is similar to correlations reported in the motivation literature, it is lower than what I originally expected. This is because, unlike most studies on L2 motivation in which the criterion measure is some sort of course achievement or standardised language proficiency score, in this investigation the obtained attitudinal/motivational variables were correlated with objective measures directly reflecting the participants' actual language behaviours in a concrete learning task. And since the relationship between motivation and learning behaviours is by definition stronger than that between motivation and learning achievement (because the latter is also influenced by

Table 2. Correlations between the language and the individual difference variables

	Words	Turns
Integrativeness	.17	.07
Incentive values	-.02	.30*
Course attitudes	.41**	.35*
Self-confidence	.35*	.23
L2 use anxiety	-.10	.00
Task attitudes	.35*	.48***
Multiple correlations	.63	.59
WTC	.25	.38*
Multiple correlations with WTC	.68	.68**

* = $p<.05$; ** = $p<.01$; *** = $p<.001$

other, non-motivational factors such as the learners' ability, learning opportunities and instructional quality), this stronger relationship was expected to show up in the correlations.

With regard to WTC, it shows a significant positive correlation with the number of turns but not with the number of words produced. This is in accordance with the construct of WTC, since it is more a measure of whether someone will initiate talk rather than how much the person actually speaks. Looking at the multiple correlations that include the WTC measure (explaining 46 per cent of the variance), it is clear that WTC explains a considerable amount of unique variance in the language measures.

Separating high-task-attitude and low-task-attitude subsamples

One possible reason why some correlations reported in Table 2 are not as high as expected might be related to the diversity in the learners' task attitudes. Let us, for a moment, look at the task situation from the students' perspective. Although the language tasks were administered during the learners' regular English classes (as mentioned earlier, the study was part of a larger-scale task-based investigation), they were not part of the official syllabus but instead served research purposes. And even though we placed a great emphasis on 'selling' our project to the students, that is, on creating positive task attitudes, it was inevitable that not everybody took the activities equally seriously. We can guess, for example, that some of the students may have looked at our project as a welcome break from the serious, 'real' school activities, whereas others may have found our tasks pointless or a nuisance. This is, in fact, quite understandable and to a certain extent inevitable with a class-room-oriented investigation such as this; however, if this assumption is true, it would mean that the behaviour of some of the students (the ones who did not take the task seriously for some reason) was somewhat disinterested/random and not necessarily reflecting their motivation to learn the L2. Such disinterested task behaviour would, in turn, depress the motivation-behaviour correlation coefficients.

In order to test this hypothesis, I divided the sample into two subgroups based on the *Task attitudes* variable, by assigning learners to the 'high-task-attitude' subsample (LowS) if their score was lower than 4; this resulted in groups of 21 and 23, respectively. Following this, I repeated the correlation analysis reported above in the two subsamples separately (see Table 3)

The results in Table 3 confirm the assumption that the two subsamples

Table 3. Correlations between the language and the individual difference variables in the high- and low-task-attitude subsamples

	High-task-attitude learners		Low-task-attitude learners	
	Words	Turns	Words	Turns
Integrativeness	.44*	.14	-.12	-.08
Incentive values	-.01	.56**	-.11	.07
Course attitudes	.11	.07	.50*	.40
Self-confidence	.53*	.38	.27	.17
L2 use anxiety	-.19	-.22	-.18	.03
Task attitudes	.37	.59**	.19	.38
WTC	.46*	.60**	.07	.18

$* = p<.05; ** = p<.01$

show different characteristics in terms of the relationship between the motivational and language variables. In the HighS, speech size correlates highly significantly with *Integrativeness* and *Self-confidence,* and the number of turns shows a significant positive correlation with *Incentive values*; the same correlations in the LowS are non-significant. This means, firstly, that amongst the learners who had positive task attitudes, the confident ones outperformed the less confident ones, wich makes sense. Secondly, the significant correlations also indicate that learners who had more positive generalised motives to accompany their high situation-specific motives (i.e. task attitudes) also tended to perform better, wich is in accordance with the suggestion presented in the Introduction that task performance is fuelled by a combination of situation-specific and generalised motives.

In the LowS we find only one significant correlation with a language measure, which is consistent with the hypothesis that because these learners failed to take the task sufficiently seriously, their performance would be somewhat disinterested/random. However, the single emerging significant relationship, between *Course attitudes* and speech size, is very important: it shows that among the learners who displayed low task-attitudes, those who had a favourable disposition toward the language course in general participated more actively in the task than those who had unfavourable attitudes toward both the course and the task. In other words, the generalised positive disposition toward the whole course neutralised some of their negative attitudes towards the particular task. This finding indicates that situation-specific motives in educational settings involve at least two distinct levels — task-related and course-related — which provides evidence for the assumption

that the complex of task motivation can be better described as a composite of multiple motivational influences related to the various actional/engagement contingencies than as a composite of trait and state motivation.

The most dramatic difference between the HighS and LowS occurs between WTC and the language measures. In the HighS, this relationship is indeed very strong: it explains 36% of the variance in the number of turns (as indicated by the correlation coefficient of .60), and even the somewhat lower (but still significant) correlation with the size of the learner's speech (.46) accounts for 21% of the variance. In contrast, the same correlations in the LowS are non-significant, which again attests to the disinterested/random nature of the performance of low-task-attitude students.

The motivational influence of the interlocutor

The results reported so far have generally supported a process-oriented conception of task motivation, and further support for this perspective would be gained if we could find indications of any impact of the interlocutor's level of motivation on his/her communication partner's task performance. That such an influence exists is a logical assumption because two interacting people affect each other in many ways, and it would also highlight the dynamic, negotiated nature of task motivation. To test this assumption, correlations were computed between the interlocutors' motivational variables and speaker's language output measures (see Table 4); in other words, if Sally and Johnny were paired, Table 4 presents the correlation between Sally's motivation and Johnny's language output.

The results shown in the table are noteworthy. For the whole sample, we find four significant correlations between the individual difference variables and the number of turns and only two with the number of words, wich is in line with the more 'mutual' nature of the former language variable (discussed earlier). The overall pattern provides strong evidence that the interlocutor's motivational disposition is related to the speaker's performance. If we break down the whole sample into HighS and LowS subgroups, we can see that interlocutor effects primarily concern the LowS, where they serve as a 'pulling force': if someone with a low task attitude is matched up with a more motivated peer, the chances are that the person's performance will improve. Although there are only three significant positive correlations in the Lows, we can find here four other correlations of .37, which is significant at the p<.10 level, indicating trends. All this points to a very consistent pattern.

Table 4. Correlations between the speakers' language measures and the interlocutors' attitudinal/motivational measures

	Whole sample		High-task-att.		Low-task-att.	
	Words	Turns	Words	Turns	Words	Turns
Integrativeness	.01	.08	-.15	-.20	.09	.21
Incentive values	.31*	.35*	.11	.19	.37	.37
Course attitudes	.25	.41**	.03	.35	.37	.42*
Self-confidence	.04	.20	.16	.26	-.07	.16
L2 use anxiety	.08	.03	-.19	.21	.37	.23
Task attitudes	.42**	.49**	.27	.22	.58**	.69***
WTC	-.01	.35*	.01	.40	.00	.35

* = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001

These interlocutor influences can be explained in two ways:

1. One might argue that the influence is primarily *linguistic* — the partner's motivational disposition affects only the partner's own performance and it is only this increased (or decreased) performance that will indirectly affect the speaker's language output in that if someone's partner initiates more (or less) speech, this will make it easier (or more difficult) for the speaker to produce speech. In other words, if Johnny speaks more, one can argue that his partner, Sally, may also produce more speech simply by reacting to Johnny and completing adjacency pairs.

2. The alternative explanation centres around *motivation* and states that the actual task motivation of the task participants is not independent from each other. If one is paired up with a highly motivated or unmotivated partner, this will affect the person's own disposition toward the task; that is, task motivation will be *co-constructed* by the task participants, with the interlocutor either pulling 'up' or 'down' the speaker.

I am more inclined towards the second explanation, primarily because I have found in the past that L2 learner interaction can be very uneven, with someone often speaking a great deal more than his/her interlocutor without being much affected by this imbalance. The real impact of the interlocutor on his/her communication partner is, I believe, caused by the 'spirit' he/she brings into the exchange, which functions as a motivational 'turn-on' or 'turn-off'. Looking at Table 4, we can also find some indirect support for this speculation in that the interlocutor's WTC does *not* affect the speaker's speech size. This shows that the fact that one's interlocutor is more talkative does not

automatically increase one's language output — which is the basis of the linguistic explanation.

The motivation of the dyads

If it is true that task motivation is (at least partially) co-constructed, this would imply that looking at the communicating dyads — rather than the individual speakers — as the basic level of analysis will produce results of increased explanatory power with regard to the motivation-behaviour relationship. Table 5 presents correlations between the motivational and language variables for the 21 dyads that participated in the study. These correlations were obtained by pooling the data for the two people in each dyad.

Table 5. Correlations between the language and the individual difference variables for the 21 dyads (i.e. with the speaker's and the interlocutor's data pooled)

	Words	Turns
Integrativeness	.13	.09
Incentive values	.22	.43
Course attitudes	.49*	.48*
Self-confidence	.31	.28
L2 use anxiety	-.04	.01
Task attitudes	.72***	.73***
Multiple correlations	*.85**	*.83**
WTC	.34	.59**
Multiple correlations with WTC	*.87*	*.90**

$* = p < .05$; $** = p < .01$; $*** = p < .001$

The coefficients in Table 5 are considerably higher than the corresponding correlations for the individual students reported in Table 2. Although some of the correlations do not reach statistical significance, this may in fact be due to the limited sample size caused by halving the number of cases when pooling the communication partners' data. The multiple correlations indicate that the motivational variables together explain 72 per cent of the variance in the total speech size and 69 per cent of the variance in the number of turns generated. These coefficients are over 30 per cent higher than the corresponding figures at the individual level (cf. Table 2), which provides strong support for the thesis of motivational co-construction. Furthermore, if we add the variance explained by WTC to that explained by the six motivational measures, we find that 76 per cent of the variance in speech size and 81 per cent

of the variance in the number of turns are explained by the individual difference variables. These unusually high figures mean that at the dyad level the motivational variables accompanied by the WTC personality trait do an excellent job in explaining the bulk of the variance in the language performance measures.

Conclusion

Admittedly, this study has several limitations, the most notable ones being the small sample size and the fact that correlations do not indicate causation (and therefore we cannot take it for granted that the individual difference factors were the independent and the language measures the dependent variables). However, I believe that the results are consistent and powerful enough to suggest some valid patterns and tendencies.

Motivation-behaviour relationship and task based research

The results in this study support the assumption that when the relationship between motivation and concrete learning behavioural measures is assessed we can obtain considerably higher correlations than when motivation is related to global achievement measures. The magnitude of the multiple correlations in Table 5 indicates that if we take into account both communication partners' motivation at the same time, we can achieve highly satisfactory explanatory power, and if we also add an index of the participants' general communicational characteristics (i.e. WTC) to the equation, the individual difference variables account for the bulk of the variance in the language measures. This also confirms, in a more general sense, the suitability of adopting a task-based framework for the purpose of motivation research. Looking at the impact of motivation on concrete learning behaviours in a situated manner will result in a clearer and more elaborate understanding of L2 motivation than the traditional research practice whereby the most common criterion variable was a general achievement of proficiency measure. On the other hand, it must also be pointed out that such a situated approach will make motivation studies more difficult to compare to each other, especially if very different tasks were used.

The relationship between general and situation-specific motives

The findings confirm that both situation-specific and more general motives contribute to task motivation but the overall construct is more complex than

the composite of state and trait motivation. It was argued that on-task behaviour is embedded in a series of broader actional contexts (e.g. going to a specific school, attending a particular class, taking up the study of a particular L2) and each of these contexts exert a certain amount of unique motivational influence. That is, it may be insufficient to assume that the learner enters the task situation with some 'trait motivation baggage' and to obtain task motivation this 'baggage' needs to be pooled with the motivational properties of the instructional task. Instead, engaging in a certain task activates a number of different levels of related motivational mindsets and contingencies, resulting in complex interferences.

Motivational processing and the dynamic co-construction of task motivation
The findings also support the conception of 'motivational processing' during task completion. The outcome of this processing is a function of a multitude of perceived information and stimuli, and in communicative L2 tasks that involve several participants, the interlocutors' motivational disposition is a key factor affecting the learner's appraisal and action control processes. In other words, task motivation is *co-constructed* by the task participants.

In sum, the main thesis of this paper is that the full complexity of task motivation becomes apparent only when we consider it within a larger context of dynamically interacting synchronic and diachronic factors and actions. This perspective requires a process-oriented approach which recognises that motivation is never static but is constantly increasing or decreasing depending on the various social influences surrounding action, the learner's appraisal of these influences and the action control operations the learner carries out on such motivational content.

Notes

* I am grateful to Jean-Marc Dewaele, Peter MacIntyre and an anonymous reviewer for their very insightful comments on an earlier draft. The final version of this chapter owes a lot to their suggestions.

1. We must note, however, that the teacher's and the students' views concerning these task boundaries might not coincide (MacIntyre, personal communication, 8 May 2001), which raises the broader question as to whether we can speak about the 'task' in general, without separating different task perceptions according to the teacher, the students and perhaps even the task designer (cf. Winne & Marx, 1989).

2. Students were to indicate on a six-point scale the extent to which they would engage in

an L1 conversation in the following five situations: standing in the bus stop with friends; asking questions in a public "teacher-student forum" at school; at a party where one doesn't know anybody; meeting a (not too close) acquaintance at the post office; and in the lift with a stranger.

Appendix

The task used in the study

You are a member of the school student committee. Your school wants to participate in the district's social life and asks students to offer their help. The following possible options have been suggested:

- Delivering lunch to elderly people in the district
- Publishing a local newsletter
- Helping out in the library
- Providing tourist information
- Performing for children in the kindergarten
- Collecting newspaper/wastepaper
- Feeding birds
- Maintaining the park
- Performing for elderly people
- Organising sports events

First, look at the list alone for three minutes and choose 5 activities you would find interesting or useful. Put them on these lines *in the order of your preference.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Second, compare your list with your partner's. The lists are probably different. Your task is to find the best compromise with your partner and *prepare a final list of 3 activities* you together will recommend to the school management.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

You have 10 minutes to convince your partner about your ideas. Make sure you give reasons but remember that you *MUST come to an agreement on the best proposal.*