The Effect of Aural Authentic Materials on the Motivation of Language Learners: A Process-Oriented Conceptualization

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a research study which investigated the effect of aural authentic materials on second or foreign language learners’ motivation. Taking the temporal dimension of motivation into account, the research aims to find out how aural authentic materials help to enhance learner motivation in a process-oriented conceptualization. In the main study, two advanced English classes which used aural authentic materials participated. The results of the questionnaires and post-questionnaire interviews indicate the positive effect of aural authentic materials on initiating and sustaining learner motivation. The findings also suggest the benefit of aural authentic materials to learning.

INTRODUCTION

According to Dörnyei and Ottó’s process model of L2 motivation (1998), it is believed that learners’ motivation has three phases—preactional, actional phase, and postactional phase. They claim that language learners’ motivation could change from time to time, and the elements which influence motivation may vary from phase to phase. Their model integrated existing motivation theories with the temporal dimension of motivation to provide researchers a new vision in motivation research. Taking the temporal dimension of motivation into account, the research aims to find out how aural authentic materials help to enhance learner motivation in a process-oriented conceptualization. A pilot research and a small-scale research had been carried out in order to find out how aural authentic materials generate and sustain learner motivation throughout learning.

THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION OF MOTIVATION

German psychologist, Heinz Heckhausen indicates that motivation should be separated into discrete phases (1991). In his Action Control Theory, he divides the motivation process into two: the predecisional phase and the postdecisional phase. Later in 1998, Dörnyei and Ottó proposed a process model of L2 motivation which drew researchers’ attention to the temporal dimension of motivation. They claim that few of the existing motivation theories “portray motivational processes as they happen in time (Dörnyei and Ottó 1998:45).” They come up with a three-phase model which contains preactional, actional, and postactional phase of motivation and suggest factors which might influence learners’ motivation in each phase.
In order to understand how aural authentic materials fit in the temporal dimension of learner motivation, I generate a motivational framework by integrating theories from the mainstream motivation researcher—Heckhausen—and educational motivation researchers—Dörnyei & Ottó, and Gardner—in an attempt to investigate how aural authentic materials influence learner motivation in different phases.

![Figure 1: Motivational Influences (Adapted from Dörnyei 2001, Gardner 1985, and Heckhausen 1991)](image)

In the predecisional phase, a variety of motivational influences have been claimed to be able to affect learners’ choice motivation. In the present study, the influences are classified into two categories—Attitudinal Influences; and Cognitive and Affective Influences. Attitudinal influences are related to learners’ attitudes toward the teacher, the task, and the material as well as their attitudes toward the cultural implications of the target language (Gardner 1985). As to Cognitive and Affective Influences, they involve how learners retrospect on their past experiences (Heider 1958; Weiner et al. 1971), expect their future outcome (Heckhausen 1967; Littlejohn 2001) and set goals (Ames 1992). As to the postdecisional phase, learners will activate their executive motivation to appraise their achievement and sustain motivation (Dörnyei 2001). They might constantly evaluate the stimuli they got from the environment—External Influences— and self-regulate themselves from time to time to control and maintain their motivation—Internal Influences. Kuhl (1985) refers to this kind of will power as action control which helps people to self-regulate themselves when carrying out tasks.

However, it is worth noting that the two phases of motivation are not clear-cut. From time to time, the motivational influences in the first phase may affect the influences in the second phase. Distinguishing choice motivation from executive motivation helps us have a clearer discussion about the influences during different period of time in learning and raise our awareness to the specific needs of learner. However, we have to note that learning is fairly a complex process. As what Graham claimed in 1994, there is no single framework or principle which could capture this complexity.

**AURAL AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND MOTIVATION**

Little et al. (1989) define that authentic materials are texts which was created for the fulfillment of certain social purposes. Since the context of the present research is set within the Listening & Speaking classes, in the present study, attention will be drawn to aural authentic materials such as radios, movies, TV programs, TV News, etc. and see how they influence learners in the predecisional and postdecisional phase of motivation.

According to Dörnyei (2001), to generate learners’ initial motivation, teachers have to enhance the
learners’ language-related values. The values can be classified into three types: *intrinsic value*, *integrative value* and *instrumental value*. Aural authentic materials are beneficial for enhancing these three values because they tend to have fewer limitations and be more variable in the choices of topics, they are *real* cultural products from the target community and they could be easily integrated with learners’ daily life.

As to the maintenance of motivation, From Figure 1, we could see that learners’ *executive motivation* could be affected by external and internal influences. In terms of external influences, the materials and tasks of aural authentic materials are more likely to sustain learners’ motivation. Dörnyei (2001:73) suggests a few strategies for teachers to sustain learners’ motivation: *breaking the monotony of learning, making the tasks more interesting*, and *increasing the involvement of the students*. Aural authentic materials show their strength in helping teachers to apply these strategies in the classrooms because such materials are diversified and related to popular culture. Cheung (2001) suggests that popular culture could prompt learners to be more responsive and active. The British Film Institution (2002) also indicates that moving images elicit productive and lively talks; stimulate ideas and responses. Furthermore, researchers also suggest that aural authentic materials could help teachers to create meaningful, interesting tasks (McGarry 1995 and Little et al. 1989). As to *internal influences*, Littlejohn (2001) indicates that a sense of competence serves as crucial factors which motivate learners to continue learning. Since aural authentic materials cover a wide range of subjects, they give learners with different interests chances to experience success in the language learning classroom. Furthermore, as mentioned in 2.2.1, aural authentic materials are more likely to meet students’ goal and generate meaningful learning. Since they consider learning relevant to them, they would be more responsible for their own learning and try to avoid distraction to protect their motivation in the *postdecisional phase*.

In order to make the discussion clear, I conclude the literature review with a table to show the relationships between aural authentic materials and learner motivation (see Table 1 overleaf). Following Dörnyei and Ottó's process model of L2 in 1998, the present study aims to find out how aural authentic materials fit in the temporal dimension of motivation. Applying the motivational framework proposed earlier (see Table 1), the present study explores how aural authentic materials generate learner motivation by enhancing the value of materials and how they sustain learner motivation in the *postdecisional phase* by producing interesting, meaningful learning so as to justify my study. The research study aims to examine two research questions:

(1) How can aural authentic materials generate learners’ motivation in language learning?
(2) How can aural authentic materials sustain learners’ motivation in language learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Aural Authentic Materials and Motivation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predecisional</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive &amp; Affective Influences</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Influences</td>
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THE STUDY

The research project consisted of an initial pilot research and a main research study. The pilot study included a classroom observation, post-class questionnaires, and a group interview which purposes were to try out methods of data collection and to explore preliminary findings. After analyzing the data and revising the instruments, a main research study was carried out in two English classes which used aural authentic materials as the media of learning. One of the classes used Lonely Planet—a tourist informative program—from Discovery Channel and took place in a five-year junior college in Taiwan in 1999. The English class observed here consisted of approximately 30 English majors who were in their fourth year in the school. It was an obligatory course which aimed to enhance students’ overall English proficiency. During the course, students learned mainly through Lonely Planet and handouts from the teacher, which included authentic reading materials from magazines, newspapers, etc.

The other class used BBC News and took place in a university in England as an in-sessional course for international students. It was an optional class opened for international students who would like to enhance their English proficiency. Since students were not required to attend the classes, the number of the students varied from time to time. However, the approximate number of student was around 50 to 100. BBC News was the only learning medium in the classroom which would be supplemented by the teacher’s handouts, including the scripts of the news clips.

41 questionnaires were given or sent to the participants in hard copy or through e-mails: 20 to the Lonely Planet English class and 21 to the students in the BBC News class. In the questionnaires for the Lonely Planet class, two additional questions were added to investigate how much the learners remember about the course content; while in the questionnaires for the BBC News class, two additional questions were added to explore respondents’ background (nationality and course of study). Following the questionnaires, five semi-structured interviews were conducted to confirm the results of the questionnaires and explore possible reasons for their answers. Each interviews lasted for approximately ten minutes. The participants consisted of four students from the BBC News class and one from the Lonely Planet class. The questionnaires and interviews were conducted in learners’ native language—Chinese. The data were analyzed in Chinese and later translated into English for presentation in an attempt to prevent discrepancy generated by translation during the analysis process.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Aural Authentic Materials vs. Motivation Initiation

The result of a question in the questionnaire—“What kind of materials do you prefer in the language classroom?”—shows that learners have positive educational attitudes toward aural authentic materials. Participants are asked to choose a maximum of three answers and rank their answers with numbers. In order to make our analysis clear, the prior answer counts as three points, the secondly prior answers counts as two points, and the third counts as one. The total scores of each item and the number of respondents selecting the item are shown in Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Material Preferences</th>
<th>textbooks</th>
<th>literature</th>
<th>magazine</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>news</th>
<th>drama</th>
<th>radio</th>
<th>songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that three of the highest scores are “drama (65),” “magazines (45),” and “TV programs (42)” while “textbooks” only has a total score of five. This indicates language learners prefer the use of authentic materials in the classroom, especially aural authentic materials. 27 out of 41 participants preferred the use of drama in the language classroom and 21 preferred TV News, which are two of the highest among all. On the other hand, only three participants claimed to prefer learning from textbooks. In the questionnaire, some participants stated their reasons for selecting the answer:

“It is interesting in terms of the contents. And also I can see and learn the live language which is used in real life.”

“I prefer these kinds of learning material because it is very lively. On the other hand, it is because of my personal interests.”

“It is more interesting and the language is more authentic, useful, and artistic.”

**Questionnaires, translated**

We could see that aural authentic materials are considered to be more interesting and meaningful to language learners. Materials such as dramas and TV programs are motivating because they help learners to connect language learning with real life and integrate their interests with learning. This indicates that by using aural authentic materials, teachers are more likely to help students to have positive educational attitude in the classroom, and as a consequence, generate their motivation to learn.

Other than learners’ educational attitude, the result of a question in the questionnaire—“What do you think is the strength of learning English from News/Lonely Plane?”—confirms the language-related values learners attach to aural authentic materials. To look at the intrinsic value first, 31 out of 41 questionnaire participants consider aural authentic materials informative and 24 consider them interesting. This indicates that learners consider the target materials intrinsically motivating. The questionnaire results are supported by the participants’ accounts in the post-questionnaire interviews.

“I think to learn English from BBC News is a very good method. Other materials are too boring.”

*Interviewee2, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

“They [authentic materials] are more interesting and more relaxing, unlike textbooks.”

*Interviewee4, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

And two of the interviewees from the BBC News class claimed that they attended the class partly because of the informative values of the materials.

“I can know what happened in the U.K. and learn English at the same time.”

*Interviewee2, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

“I take the course as watching news.”

*Interviewee3, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

This indicates that the interesting and informative nature of aural authentic materials could prompt
learners to attach more intrinsic value to the materials, and as a consequence, motivates them to enroll in the class. In terms of the integrative value, 28 of the participants claimed that they could learn the culture of the English-speaking country from aural authentic materials. Interviewee 4 and 5 both stressed the integrative value of aural authentic materials in their interviews.

“Because there is a story in the movie. The culture is involved in the story.”
*Interviewee4, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

“You can learn English from real life. Or maybe you can say, you will see how the people in the target community live.”
*Interviewee5, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

This indicates that learners consider aural authentic materials to have integrative values because they could “see” the real life of the target community rather than merely “hear” or “read” about the culture. Since they are the real cultural products from the target community, they could help learners to “experience” the culture with their own eyes. As to instrumental values, 18 out of the 41 participants claimed they consider the vocabulary from aural authentic materials more useful and 14 participants from the Lonely Planet class believed that they could acquire colloquial English from TV programs. The same result can be found in the post-questionnaire interviews where participants consider aural authentic materials more practical and more able to help them achieve their personal goals.

“I would like to learn from materials which are more relevant to daily life. […] I don’t like materials which are too academic.”
*Interviewee2, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

“Textbooks only focus on grammar and some basis of language learning. But what we will use in real life is more practical.”
*Interviewee4, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

“They [TV programs, movies, and News] are also more practical. Since we’re not learning for exams, we don’t need to learn from textbooks.”
*Interviewee5, post-questionnaire interviews, translated*

Since the language in aural authentic materials is closer to real life, such materials are considered to be more practical and meaningful to learners. On the other hand, textbooks put more emphasis on grammar and sentence structures. It is considered to be more useful for learners who are learning English for exam purpose.

**Aural Authentic Materials vs. Motivation Maintenance**

In terms of how aural authentic materials sustain learners’ English learning motivation, in the questionnaire, respondents were asked to state whether they had continued using the target aural authentic material to learn English after class. 34 out of the 41 respondents (83%) gave positive answers to the question. Results of the questionnaires and interviews indicate that this may be because of the attractive and meaningful nature of aural authentic materials.
In terms of attractiveness, in the questionnaire, participants were asked to assess the attractiveness of the target materials in four-point Likert scales in which 1 means tedious and 4 means interesting. The result shows that 27 participants (66%) considered the target materials interesting, 13 slightly interesting (32%), while none considered them tedious (0%). It means that the target materials are considered to be interesting to 98% of the target learners. The result of a question in the questionnaire—“Generally, which material do you think is more interesting?”—reveals that 38 out of 41 participants (93%) considered aural authentic materials to be more interesting than textbooks. The questionnaire results correspond to the participants’ accounts in the post-questionnaire interviews when they were asked to choose a type of learning materials which better sustain their attention.

“Movies or TV, I guess. [...] It is more interesting, especially movies. You will get involved in the story. However, concentration doesn’t mean you can systematically acquire what you hear because under that occasion your focus is not on language but on the content of the movie.”

Interviewee2, post-questionnaire interviews, translated

“I think if you use movies or songs in class, students might be very motivated in learning and they will show interests to the materials but they will easily get too relaxed.”

Interviewee4, post-questionnaire interviews, translated

It’s interesting to note that both learners stressed the interesting nature of aural authentic materials and its strength in maintaining learner motivation. However, both of them were concerned about its effectiveness in learning. One possible reason for their concern may be related to the English learning environment in Taiwan. In typical English classes in Taiwan, learners are taught grammar rules and long lists of vocabulary and lessons are mainly exam-oriented. That is why their stereotypes of English lessons prompted them to believe that effective English lessons should focus on forms rather than meaning. Other than this, the respondents’ concern also indicates that the language learning value of aural authentic materials is highly influenced by how teachers present them. Although it might be true that aural authentic materials sustain students’ attention better than textbooks in the classroom, it does not necessarily indicate that there is more learning taking place. Since aural authentic materials are not designed for language learning purposes, it is essential for language teachers who use aural authentic materials to design tasks that encourage learning and to provide assistance to students from time to time so as to help learners get the most out of the class.

As to meaningfulness, the result of the questionnaires reveals that 19 respondents (46%) considered the target aural authentic materials meaningful, 18 (44%) slightly meaningful, 4 (10%) slightly meaningless, and none considered them meaningless. The result shows that a majority of the target learners (90%) thought the materials are practical. Similar results can be found in the post-questionnaire interviews while the participants talked about why they had continued using the target aural authentic materials to learn English after class.

“I think the program is very interesting and you can really learn things you want to learn. It is a practical tourism program. [...] When you watch the program, learning English is not the only purpose.”

Interviewee1, post-questionnaire interviews, translated

“I want to know what is happening in the U.K. [...] Through BBC news, we not only learn what is
happening here in the U.K. but also watch news all around the world.”

Interviewee3, post-questionnaire interviews, translated

The participants’ accounts show that aural authentic materials are beneficial in generating meaningful learning because they give learners an authentic purpose for watching. Since the materials are more relevant to learners’ real life needs and wants, learners are more willing to continue learning English from such materials on their own. It is interesting to note that interviewee 3 also considered aural authentic materials more meaningful because the content is more up-to-date.

“If you want a textbook to include all aspects of life, it is pretty hard…Learners merely learn from one textbook throughout the semester but the world outside keeps changing.”

Interviewee3, post-questionnaire interviews, translated

The biggest purpose of the creation of language is communication. Even in first language, people absorb new information and knowledge to make it possible to communicate with others. This applies to second or foreign language learning. Second language learners also need to learn up-to-date language so as to enable them to communicate with others without having gaps.

Aural Authentic Materials vs. Long-Term Memory

It is worth noting that, by the time the present study was conducted, it had been five years since the participants took the lesson which used Lonely Planet. This gives us a chance to see what kind of materials—written authentic materials or aural authentic materials—lead learning toward long-term retention. In the questionnaires for respondents who took the Lonely Planet class, two additional questions were asked to investigate the effect of different materials on retaining learners’ memory. Results of these additional questions show that 17 out of the 20 students (85%) who took the lesson still remembered the content of the movie clips from Lonely Planet, while only 3 students (15%) remembered the content of the written materials from magazines. Within these 17 respondents who claimed to remember the content of Lonely Planet, some can even name the vocabulary they learned from the movie clips such as “control your libido,” “scusi (Italian),” etc. It is worth mentioning that even an Italian word that occurs in the movie clip retained in the learner’s memory after five years. In the context of Taiwan, this is a word that could be hardly seen or used elsewhere in the target learners’ life. However, the word entered the learner’s long-term memory even she possibly only heard it once in class. I believe this shares similar concept with Total Physical Response, a well-known English teaching method, in which language learners use actions to strengthen their memory about vocabulary or sentences. Results of the questionnaires suggest that, in the same fashion, the pictures, sounds, and stories in the movie clips may help to strengthen learners’ impression about the target language.

CONCLUSION

A few concluding points about aural authentic materials and learner motivation can be made:

■ Aural authentic materials are beneficial in terms of initiating learner motivation because learners tend to have positive educational attitudes toward such materials and learners also attach more language-related values to aural authentic materials.

■ Aural authentic materials may generate meaningful and interesting learning which helps to sustain learner motivation and encourage the development of autonomous learners.
Since aural authentic materials are not especially controlled and designed for language learners, they require more assistance from teachers to promote more efficient learning. Aural authentic materials are more likely to lead learning toward long-term retention.

The concluding points above help us see how aural authentic materials fit in the temporal dimension of learner motivation and suggest a few of their benefits in learning. However, we have to note that learner motivation is a fairly complex process. It is possible that one influence might be influential to both phases and, moreover, some actions might occur simultaneously. Graham (1994) indicates that there is no single word or principle which could capture the complexity of motivation. The motivational framework mentioned in the research seems to suggest that the motivation process could be divided into isolated phases, however, we have to note that this is not how human behavior works. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) also suggest that each motivational phase might overlaps in a complex manner. The biggest function of the process-oriented motivational framework is to provide us an overall look on learner motivation and allow us to have clearer discussion about the influences in each phase. It does not suggest that learner motivation is processed in clear-cut phases.

Moreover, learners’ motivation may be influenced simultaneously by many variables. Material is only one of them. It means aural authentic materials do not “guarantee” the enhancement of learner motivation. From time to time, it has to be cooperated with the teaching styles of the teachers. During the interviews, some learners considered teachers to influence their motivation more than the materials. “The most important thing is how the teacher assists students.”

Interviewee1, post-questionnaire interviews, translated

This indicates that, in order to make aural authentic materials effective in motivating learners, there are other aspects for teachers to consider such as their teaching styles, the follow-up tasks, etc. The role of teachers in the implementation of aural authentic materials in second or foreign language curriculums may also be an interesting area for researchers or baseline teachers to research further.

Although this is a fairly small-scale research study, the findings help us to confirm the motivating nature of aural authentic materials and their benefits in language learning, which warrants further research into this direction. The greatest value of aural authentic materials is that it triggers and maintains students’ motivation in learning and helps to develop independent learners. Class contact time is limited. The greatest success of teachers is to help learners to see the charm of learning and inspire them to continue learning on their own. In this case, the benefit of the lessons will not be limited to the present but last throughout learners’ life.

REFERENCES


