

# Motivational Dynamics in Computer-Mediated Communication Activities

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## Abstract

This study investigated the motivational dynamics of Japanese English learners during their participation in computer-mediated cross-cultural communication activities from the perspective of dynamic systems theory (DST; e.g., Ellis, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). The primary aim of this study was to examine the motivational dynamics of the learners (i.e., how, when, and why their motivation fluctuated during the participation in the target activities), thereby evaluating the quality of learning materials such as discussion topics and tasks. The participants were 4 Japanese university students learning English as a foreign language and participated in the target activities. To micro-map the motivational dynamics of these students, (1) they were asked to rate their motivation at 5 minutes intervals with an instrument called Motometer (Waninge, deBot, & Dörnyei, 2014), (2) their online discussion was video-recorded and coded on the basis of the events happened in the discussion time and (3) all the information was summarized in a composite data sheet. The results indicated that all the students were said to be highly motivated but they still showed some fluctuations in their motivation during their discussion time. The results also suggested that their motivation was undermined when unexpected problems (e.g., odd audio sound) occurred.

## Keywords

Motivational Dynamics, Dynamic Systems Theory, Computer-Mediated Communication, Cross-Cultural Communication

## Introduction

During the last decade, researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have seen a *dynamic shift* in the research paradigm (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015) and discussed the

potential of a new research approach, which is often referred to as dynamic systems theory (DST; e.g., Ellis, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). As a result, the new approach has recently attracted significant attention from SLA researchers and as an alternative approach to traditional quantitative approaches, it has come to be frequently adopted in empirical research on L2 acquisition process (for details, see Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Thus, as the proponents have argued (e.g., Dörnyei et al., 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015), DST has been regarded as a promising research approach and expected to help SLA researchers delineate the complex nature of L2 acquisition process, further examine the significance of learner's development or change and deal with various factors (e.g., learner's internal/external factors, context) as a part of system.

In line with the dynamic turn in the field of SLA, L2 motivation researchers have also sought to adopt such a DST guided research approach to investigate the dynamic nature of L2 motivation. In short, DST enables L2 motivation researchers to take a sort of process-oriented approaches to their motivation research and allows them to see when, how, and why learners' motivation fluctuates in a given learning context. To be more precise, as Waninge, deBot and Dörnyei (2014) argued, DST enables L2 researchers to explore at least three kinds of key aspects that are thought to bring about the dynamics of motivational development: change, stability and contextual dependency.

## 1 Present study

In the light of the current situation in the field of L2 motivation research, the present study aimed to discuss the applicability of DST to empirical research on L2 motivation in the context of computer-mediated communication. To do so,

the study employed the research method and data analysis procedures adopted in Waninge et al. (2014) and investigated the motivational dynamics of Japanese English learners during their participation in the target activities, focusing on motivational change, stability and contextual dependency. With reference to motivational fluctuation among the students, the study also aimed to evaluate the quality of learning materials such as discussion topics and tasks.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 4 Japanese university students learning English as a foreign language. All the students took an English course where they were supposed to join the target cross-cultural communication activities. In the activities, they discuss various topics related to media with Asian students.

### 2.2 Instrument

As in Waninge et al. (2014), the concept of motivation was operationally defined in terms of (1) the degree of effort each of the students put into learning the materials and (2) the degree of enjoyments they felt in the ongoing discussion. To assess the students' motivation, the study employed a modified version of Motometer (Waninge et al., 2014), a novel research instrument to rate one's own motivation. Although Waninge et al. (2014) designed the instrument to assess one's motivation as a composite of two different concepts (1) the degree of effort and (2) the degree of enjoyment, the present study modified the scale and designed it to rate these two concepts separately because it was expected that the degree of effort would not necessary co-occur with their feeling of enjoyment. The main topic in the discussion analyzed in this study was "Pop Culture".

### 2.3 Data collection/analysis procedures

Data collection was conducted in May 2016, when the students joined online discussion (50 minutes) with Asian students. Data collection and data analysis procedures were as follows.

- (1) During the discussion time, the students were asked to rate their motivation at 5 minutes intervals, using Motometer.
- (2) They were also asked to take notes about when they discussed each of discussion

topics listed in their textbook.

- (3) To see when, how, and why these students' motivation fluctuated, their online discussion was recorded and coded on the basis of the events happened in the session.
- (4) To micro-map the motivational dynamics, all the information collected in the above steps (1)(2)(3) were summarized in a composite data sheet (see Figure 1).

## 3 Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows a sample of composite data sheet<sup>1</sup>.

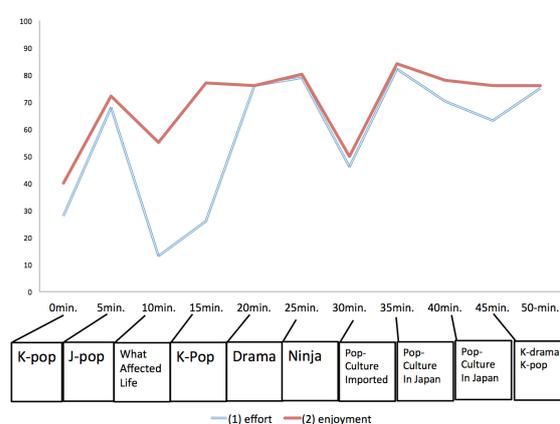


Figure 1: A sample of composite data sheet

## 4 Summary

The results indicated that all the students were highly motivated but they still showed some fluctuations in their motivation during their discussion time. The results also suggested that their motivation was undermined when unexpected problems (e.g., odd audio sound) occurred.

### Selected References

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<sup>1</sup> This sample shows the degree of motivation and the topics discussed in each time slot.