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# Adult Student Motivation for Advanced ESL Learning: A Group Case Study

**In recent years, TESOL has called for the study of the social and cognitive factors that affect adult English learners' participation in formal language learning. This research project investigated the motivational processes of 10 adult immigrant English learners that led them to take an advanced community college ESL course. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative strategies, the study found that the surveyed group of ESL students chose to engage in advanced language learning in order to, first and foremost, join the dominant language culture and community. Instrumental reasons, though quite important to these students, appeared to be outweighed by the integrative ones. The student's social identity proved to be an important factor in this process as student motivation often originated in the disjuncture between the learner's current and desired identities. Furthermore, students viewed language education as a necessary transitional path toward integration and attainment of a desired identity.**

## Introduction

TESOL scholarship, originating in the field of applied linguistics, has, at times, overlooked nonlanguage factors and contexts that may affect language learning. However, much of the knowledge about these factors and contexts gained through education and psychology studies can be applicable to the populations and topics under study in TESOL. After all, in California, nonnative English speakers constitute the majority of the target adult learners (63%) and almost a third in the country overall (Lasater & Elliott, 2004). The research presented in this paper appropriates some of the advances gained by contemporary adult education and educational psychology scholarship. It also draws on recent linguistics scholarship, specifically the studies related to motivation for second language (L2) learning.

## Review of the Literature

### Adult Learning from a Social Cognitive Perspective

Adult learning theory postulates that because of important physical and

psychological developments in adult life, adult learners bring to the learning situation status, responsibilities, and functions different from those of children. Factors such as possession of reasons for learning, the adult concept of the self, timing of learning experience to life events, need for application of knowledge to real-life situations, and the internal origin of motivation to learn have direct bearing on the adult's engagement in a learning activity (Knowles, 1990). Voluntary participation in education happens only when learning itself is meaningful and relevant to the adult students' sense of who they are and what they want to be (Keller, 1983; Kidd, 1973).

Learning as a psychological process happens in a multifaceted interaction with the learner's world. Set in a social context, adult learning is not simply a process of receptive acquisition but also one of externalization. Jarvis (1987) and Mezirow (1981) suggested a correlation between adults' potential to learn and the harmony between them and the environment in which they function. "When there is disharmony or discontinuity—both subsumed under the idea of *disjuncture*—then people have to seek to adjust (learn), so that harmony can be reestablished" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 79). Learning activity may occur as a proactive, relevant, and meaningful response of the adult to the conflict generated by disjuncture.

Applying this concept to adult immigrant experience, it seems likely that fundamental life changes brought about by immersion in a society communicating in an unfamiliar language, compounded by the necessity to function in it, may cause disjuncture in these adults' lives and prompt them to seek language education in order to adjust to these changes. Some immigrants may seek language education immediately upon arrival; for others, the language disjuncture may occur later in their lives when higher levels of language proficiency (i.e., beyond the survival skills) may be desired. Deficiency of knowledge combined with an evolved self-concept set in a specific sociocultural milieu may then generate a new need—a need to learn.

Through the influence of sociocultural and situated cognition theories, educational psychology recognized that besides the social context, other multiple contexts influence student motivation—for example, learners' culture, learning tasks, or classroom setting (Julkunen, 2001; Volet & Jarvela, 2001).

### What Is Motivation?

My preferred definition of *motivation* explains it as "the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect" (Keller, 1983, p. 389). In this study motivation is operationalized as "sustained interest in formal second language learning manifested through participation in formal L2 learning activities."

Motivation is not a stable condition. Keller pointed out *relevance* of the learning situation as a prerequisite to sustaining motivation through time. Relevance extends beyond the learner's education goals to include the fulfillment sought from the learning process for the psychological needs of achievement, affiliation, and power. A loss of relevance or failure in a learning situation dissolves a student's motivation, causing *amotivation*.

*Motivation for Language Learning*

Study of motivation for language learning began in 1959 with Gardner and Lambert's sociolinguistic study of students studying French as a second language in Montreal. Gardner and Lambert identified two factors that shared variance in common with the measure of L2 proficiency: *Language aptitude* (language learning ability) and *motivation*, the latter comprising attitudes toward the L2 community, interest in learning L2, and reasons for learning L2. To test student motivation, Gardner developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery *(*AMTB), a set of Likert-scale subtests with which he would assess various motives, an instrument later used "pervasively" (Jacques, 2001) in motivation research.

After conducting a series of studies, Gardner (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) proposed a "socio-educational" model of second language acquisition that centers on two overarching classes of reasons for language learning called *orientations:* the *integrative orientation* (desire to learn a language in order to interact with, and perhaps to identify with, members of the L2 community) and the *instrumental orientation* (driven by the learner's practical goals, such as attaining an academic goal or career advancement). The two orientations are not always mutually exclusive. A further distinction was made between *intrinsic* (learning for self-accomplishment) and *extrinsic* (driven by external circumstances) factors in student motivation. Brown (1991) asserted that most research showed the "superiority of intrinsic motivation in educational settings" (p. 247). The socioeducational model has undergone a few changes, and though none of the proposed versions have been found universal for all L2 learning contexts (Au, 1988; Canagarajah, 2006), the integrative/instrumental dichotomy continues to dominate the field.

The early 1990s saw a surge of interest in language-learning motivation after publication of Crookes and Schmidt's 1991 article "Motivation: Reopening the Research Agenda" in *Language Learning*. Several important books combining current studies with historical overviews have since been published on the subject. For example, *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition* (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001) includes 20 research reports and overviews, featuring language-learning motivation research from around the world.

*Social identity*, a person's definition of his or her "meaning in the world" and value to others (Eckert, 2000), has emerged as a new focus in the study of student motivation. As early as 1977, Taylor, Meynard, and Rheault showed that contact and threat to identity related more significantly to L2 proficiency than instrumental or integrative motivation. Recently there has been a growth of interest in the role of identity in second language acquisition (Norton, 2000), exposing new links between language learning and the learners' changing perspective of themselves in a new language environment. For example, Peirce (1995) introduced the concept of *investment* in learning a dominant language in order to "acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources [and] increase the value of [the learners'] cultural capital" (p. 17), while Sfard and Prusak (2005) suggested learning itself to be the closing of a gap between the learners' actual and projected identities.

Recently, qualitative methodologies for motivation research also began to emerge, employing interviews and observation to study language-learning motivation. These studies offered a vision of language-learning motivation as a dynamic, longitudinal process in which the learners' cognitions and beliefs (Ushioda, 2001), and the relevance of the curriculum to the learners' interests (Syed, 2001), directly affect involvement in learning.

### Motivation in the Language Classroom

In the classroom context, motivation is a continuous, interactive process between the learner and the learning environment. "In directing and coordinating various operations towards an object or goal, motivation transforms a number of separate reactions into significant action" (Julkunen, 2001, p. 30; see also Crookes and Schmidt, 1991). Pintrich and Schunk (1996) also view motivation as a process "whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (p. 4). In this context, the learner's actions signifying interest and engagement in the learning process can be used to substantiate motivation. Crookes (2003) defines such manifestations of motivation as "persistence," which occurs when a person focuses action on the same thing for an extended period (p. 129). To elicit information about student motivation in the classroom context, Syed (2001) used observation (among other methods) in his study of adult heritage-language learners. He observed how student motivation was affected as a result of class atmosphere, turn-taking and teacher-student interaction, and learning activities used in the class.

A motivated learner, furthermore, may employ metacognitive *learning strategies*, which are "specific learning techniques that make learning more effective" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 95). In discussing the ways to maintain and protect motivation, Dörnyei lists 18 such strategies applicable to language learning, including word cards, written summaries, asking for help, and practicing with a friend (Table 7).

### Motivational Processes Among ESL Learners

Only lately did linguists begin to distinguish between second and foreign language learners in the study of motivation and to propose that "the dynamics involved in learning these two different types of language may be quite different" (Gardner, 2001, p. 11). So far, the overwhelming majority of motivation studies seem to be in foreign-language class settings. The very volume of 20 motivation studies from which Gardner's quote is taken contains no studies of ESL students.

Motivational processes among ESL learners, just like those among foreign language learners reported by Gardner and Lambert (1959), affect student success in mastering language. For example, Kakihara (2006), using both an AMTB and interviews in her study of 14 Japanese women learning English in the US, found that positive, integrative attitudes toward English-speaking Americans correlated with improvement in ability to judge grammaticality of given sentences.

Noels, Adrian-Taylor, and Johns (1999) found that ESL students to whom English was a prerequisite to other subjects or an academic degree were more

driven by extrinsic motives for learning than EFL learners. This was consistent with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) hypothesis about the significance of the instrumental orientation when there is an urgency about mastering a second language.

A motivation survey of 580 adult immigrants at a community-based ESL program in Toronto, Ontario (Paper, 1990), rated highest the following motives for learning English: linguistic needs, basic skills, cultural awareness, social interaction, and résumé writing. Age, education level, and length of residence were found to be insignificant as motivational factors. The weight of integrative orientation in the results led the author to recommend the inclusion of teaching of Canadian culture in the program curriculum.

*Volition for immigration* emerged as a motivating factor in language learning in a qualitative study of adult ESL students in New York City (Brilliant, Lvovich, & Markson, 1995). "Students who make an active, internally motivated choice to leave their country of origin," they noted, "seem to make a smoother transition and to acquire English language more readily than do students whose decision to leave was a passive one" (p. 58). Similarly, Menard-Warwick (2005) situated ESL experience of immigrant Latinas within a larger sociopolitical context in which immigration and connected life events served as motivating or amotivating factors for language learning.

Consistent with educational psychology, *student beliefs* appear to play a central role in adult learning experience and achievements, which made them a subject of motivation research. In one such study, Bernat (2004) assessed the beliefs of 20 unemployed Vietnamese students in a vocational ESL course in Sydney, Australia. The students scored highly on both motivational orientations: 85% of respondents expressed the (integrative) desire to get to know and become friends with English-speaking Australians, while all respondents agreed that learning to speak English well would give them better employment opportunities.

## Research Question

Previous research on motivation for language learning established a link between adult student motivation and engagement in language-learning activities. It revealed that student beliefs, attitudes, and goals, influenced by the sociocultural context of their lives, played an important role in their motivation for language study. These studies, however, did not look specifically at the motivational processes of adult immigrant students engaged in advanced second language study at academic institutions. In other words, there is a lack of understanding as to why this group of students, many of whom have family and work obligations, would seek language education past the survival-skill level.

The need to further the study of the adult ESL student's motivation is reflected in the 1998 *Research Agenda for Adult ESL* prepared by the National Clearinghouse on ESL Literacy Education with support from TESOL. More recently, TESOL has again called for research that views English language learning as a process of individual change, specifically, in "relation between social context and internal cognitive changes" (2004 TESOL Research Agenda, 2C).

This research project, a case study of motivational processes within adult

immigrant English learners engaged in one advanced ESL course, addressed the following research question: Why do adult immigrant learners of English take advanced academic ESL courses?

## Methodology

### Subjects

This study was carried out in a 6-unit ESL reading course at Long Beach City College. This high-advanced–level course was a last required step before transferring into the mainstream English curriculum.

Ten immigrant adult students enrolled in this course constituted the majority of the class and served as study subjects. The 2 international students who attended the class were intentionally excluded from this study. The gender distribution among the subjects was 30% male versus 70% female (Appendix A). The age distribution was spread relatively evenly within the 17-39 range, averaging age 30. Half the students were married. Half of the participants had children. Two out of 10 were caretakers of older parents or relatives. Most students were employed; 2 were unemployed. Nine spoke Spanish as their first language, and the other one spoke Khmer. The Spanish speakers came from Mexico (6), El Salvador (2), and Ecuador (1).

The students' education background before they entered the community college ESL program varied. Three students completed 6-9 grades in their native countries. Five others completed a high-school equivalent, including 2 who earned a university degree in their native countries. Three students earned a high-school/GED diploma in the US. Length of stay in the US varied widely among the students, with the largest group (5) falling in the 4-6–year range.

### Data Collection

The study employed individual interviews to elicit in-depth descriptive data on student beliefs and attitudes, specifically about their motivation for language learning and the surrounding sociocultural context. All interviews were conducted in English, tape-recorded, and transcribed. The study adopted Ushioda's (2001) method of conducting a loosely structured interview to explore subjects' working conceptions of motivation that related to the research question. Several open-ended questions related to the research questions were used as jump-off points for conversation throughout the interview (Appendix B).

The participants were also surveyed with an AMTB to test their responses on 6 *value components* identified in previous research on motivation for language learning (Appendix C). The first 3 aligned more strongly with the instrumental end of the orientation dichotomy ("professional and educational goals," "communication needs with important others," and "encouragement for language learning from relevant others"), and the other 3 ("attitudes toward L2 speakers and culture," "volition of immigration to the US," "enjoyment of language learning as a cultural activity") with the integrative one. The additional value component was motivational intensity. Each construct was tested with at least 4 statements. The results were tabulated, and a mean and

standard deviation were calculated for each question. The study also collected relevant sociocultural data, including participant demographics, as well as projected educational and professional goals (Appendix A).

Interview and survey results were triangulated with the observation data, which provided information on students' motivational dynamics in the real-time classroom and helped expose the context of the participants' survey responses (Appendix D). The researcher observed 6 class sessions during the last 4 weeks of the class, for a total of 15 hours, excluding quiz or exam sessions. The following four groups of student behaviors were studied: "attendance and timely arrival," "participation and turn-taking," "timeliness of homework delivery," and "engagement in class activities and general classroom conduct." In addition, students' "self-directed learning strategies," which emerged during the study as another expression of learning motivation, were documented. It should be noted that the observation data were somewhat limited because of the extreme teacher-centered teaching style set by the instructor.

Last, the researcher collected the course syllabus and grade and attendance records.

### Findings and Discussion

The study findings suggest adult motivation for language learning occurring in a particular learning situation to be a highly complex, yet explicable, phenomenon.

#### Sociocultural Context of Language Learning

Advanced language learning appeared inseparable from the sociocultural context in which it took place. Outside of class, these students commonly engaged in bilingual and even monolingual L2 practices. Though it was possible for most study participants as Spanish speakers living in greater Los Angeles to function entirely in their native language, the cumulative picture that emerged from the surveys and interviews showed that most students commonly used both languages off campus, while use of their native languages was limited primarily to their family networks.

The students' extensive work and family responsibilities also had an effect on their learning. Work and babysitter schedules, for instance, affected enrollment and attendance. Communication needs with valued others, particularly friends and colleagues, also had some influence on participation in advanced ESL education. The encouragement from those others, however, was a weak factor for learning, and parental influence was particularly insignificant.

Interviews shed light on one particular place where the social context and motivation for language learning crossed paths. Prompted by the question "Has anything happened in your personal life that has influenced your interest in studying English?" participants often produced narratives illustrating how their motivation originated in specific instances of disjuncture between their L2 proficiency and the needs arising from the social context of their lives.

For example, Lucia felt isolated in her social circle. Her friends spoke flu-

ent English and had to switch to Spanish when addressing her. The sense of separation and embarrassment motivated her to resume her English studies.

> I've been meeting people, they are from Central America or South America. They are here living probably 15-20 years already, so they speak English very well. So, one of them, we are friends, but sometimes I feel like we cannot be together, we cannot be friends because I'm not at the level she is. Sometimes, that push me down because I have a big, big difference, because she speak English very well and Spanish, and I don't. And sometimes when we go to places together, sometimes I understand what people tell me, sometimes I don't, and I feel so embarrassed. That's why I'm here trying to improve myself. She told me, c'mon, *mija,* you have to go to school. I didn't do it. That happened, like, 6 months ago that I decided to come to college.

Anabel's poor English skills were detrimental to her career growth. To her, learning the language and moving up the employment ladder went hand in hand.

Anabel: First thing I want to know the language, everything that is English—all the pronunciation, I want it get better because my work. I get this right, speak with everybody, and I want to be able to understand, sometimes I don't understand some words. That is why I'm here and I want to get my degree, administrative assistant. That's why I'm trying to do that. …

Interviewer: How long have you worked at this office?

Anabel: Three years. It's gonna be 3 years. But I'm moving up because my English and my school. Before I start in the warehouse and then I jumped to the QC [quality control], then went to the clerk, and now I'm revenue auditor.

### Connection to Life Goals

The study findings upheld the educational psychology theory's vision of adult participation in learning as a self-directed, goal-oriented process. Students' goals in mastering advanced language, however, reached beyond the immediate learning activities and were tied to a desired career path. Nine out of 10 students planned to transfer to the mainstream curriculum to obtain an academic degree or vocational training. Study participants set their education goals in accordance with their professional aspirations, or as Patricia stated succinctly in her interview: "I wanna get a better job and I wanna learn more English because I wanna get a career." On the survey, they rated highly the notion that they studied ESL in order to achieve a better job in their current or different profession and expected tangible financial benefits from it. The study participants also agreed highly with the motive of completion of the ESL program in order "to enter an educational program to prepare for the job of my choice."

Furthermore, the *quality* of language also mattered in that they did not

want just to acquire a language but a certain level of language compatible with their goals. For instance, when asked about the reasons for continuing to take ESL classes while his English was already strong, Daniel replied, "Well, it's strong, but I think I need to be prepared for what I want to do. Instead of talk, talking, street talking and all that. I need another step." To another student, Tomas, who had completed his university education and worked as an engineer in Mexico, "good English" was necessary to recapture his academic success here in the US: "If I want to get a master degree, I need English. If I want to keep studying here, I need to speak good English to understand and write and listen."

In this process, the ESL program was viewed as transitional step toward achieving a long-term educational goal. The participants' projected workplace language environment gravitated toward English-only, as did their desired language practices. For example, 6 subjects desired long-term careers in English-only environments and 3 others in bilingual workplaces.

### *Integrative Versus Instrumental Motivation*

The findings revealed that the surveyed students' attitudes were strongly oriented toward integration into the English-speaking society, a trend that appeared to play an equal, if not a dominant, role in their participation in language learning. The study subjects exhibited a markedly high level of desire to join the English-speaking community and use English most of the time. On the survey, communication with English speakers was rated the highest (90%) as a single motive for learning, while the English speakers' culture was also viewed positively.

Moreover, motivation for formal language learning appeared linked to student socialization in the new culture, specifically, their desire to assimilate. This became evident through a strong correlation between the strength of surveyed integrative components within a student's motivation and his or her projected identity as a member of the L2 culture. Stronger integratively oriented students also appeared to view themselves as more motivated as evidenced by the survey results in the motivation intensity component.

They also demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm about learning English as an activity. The statements "I really enjoy learning English" and "I enjoy using English outside of class when I get a chance" were highly agreed with particularly highly, 94% and 98% respectively. This factor correlated to the attendance records and the tardiness in the observed sessions. Those students who scored high on this concept in the written survey always arrived in class on time and had low absence rates per the instructor's records. By the same token, the 3 students who were absent the most in the class, up to 21% of the entire course, evaluated themselves lower on the enthusiasm scale. The classroom culture was highly disciplined, and these students' attendance behavior stood out among generally good attendance and timely arrival of other students.

An interview with one of these students, Lucia, also confirmed the impression given by the survey results.

This is the first class in this college that I'm not on time. … Just this week, I've been so tired and so stressed. I have to work, and I'm tired, and the class is sometimes a little boring. So I just like, whatever. [If] I'm late, I'm late, I'm gonna get it anyway. … Sometimes I tell myself I don't need to be there to do this. I just come because she counts the days I'm here.

Interestingly, the level of enthusiasm about language learning ran at times contrary to individual academic performance. That is, of the top 3 students who scored 96-100% on the written survey, 2 failed the class. However, a group of 4 students who had the highest record of absences, tardiness, and in-class chatting, passed the class while 4 other students who failed it had two or fewer absences.

In comparison to the integrative components, career aspirations, immediate communications needs, and other "tangible" benefits arising from English proficiency appeared to be equally or less important to adult learners. In other words, students wanted to learn English because they liked the English-speaking Americans and their culture, and wanted to be part of it, whether or not such learning was to bring them financial rewards.

It must be noted that the line between instrumental and integrative motives for language learning was often blurred, which concurs with the literature review. For example, the aforementioned interest in working at English-only workplaces or the existence of communication needs with L2-speaking friends could be a viewed as a mix of both instrumental and integrative phenomena.

### Role of Social Identity in Language Learning

This proved to be an important factor shaping student motivation. The interviews, in particular, highlighted the relationship between the "designated identity" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), a projected perception of one's self, and language learning as a path toward it. What emerged is a strong correlation between a participant's view of himself or herself as a member of the L2 culture and high integrative content in their motivation for language learning. Students also perceived their formal learning activities as a path toward both integration and attainment of the desired identity.

For example, Tomas, who said he wanted to talk as if he "were like an American," scored very high on the survey in his attitudes toward the L2 speakers and culture and on other integrative questions. This is how he explained it:

Tomas:       I like English, the language, and I like to read most of the articles in the magazines, everything. And I like to meet people, I like to understand them, I like to learn, but good English … I'd like to talk like if I were like an American.
Interviewer: That makes sense. But do you have other reasons like you want to get a job?
Tomas:       Yeah, but if I speak good English, of course, I will get a job.
Interviewer: So that would follow?

Tomas:      Yes.

On the other hand, Chibith, concerned with retaining her Cambodian identity, scored much lower in her integrative orientation. Her attitude was in no way negative, and she appreciated the benefits language proficiency would bring her. However, she was keen on keeping the balance between her "Americanized" and Cambodian selves. The fact that she was born in the US was a likely factor in her identity struggle.

Chibith:    I'd like to be seen as Cambodian. … All these new generations coming up, they don't understand, they don't know who they are. And that thing pisses me off, you know? All they know is how to speak is English and they should, because they forget themselves, and I don't want to be like them. So I'm trying to learn English, at the same time, remember my own culture and who I am.
Interviewer: Trying to keep a balance?
Chibith:    Yeah. … I want to advance as far as I can and try to be Americanized and at the same time know who I am and what culture my parents came from.

### Immigration History

Similar to the findings in Brilliant, Lvovich, and Markson's 1995 study cited in the review, the volition of immigration appeared to be a factor in language learning. This was discussed during the interviews, using jump-off questions centering on the participants' reasons for coming to the US and their feelings about it then and now.

Here are two opposite examples of the influence of immigration history.

Daniel:     All my family is here. My family, my mom, my dad, and my sister. I was the only one over there, the rest of my family were here.
Interviewer: Are you glad that you came?
Daniel:     Yeah. [laughs]
Interviewer: Do you like living in the US?
Daniel:     Yeah.
Interviewer: Does this affect your interest in studying English?
Daniel:     Yeah.
Interviewer: How so?
Daniel:     Well, because I use it every day.

Interviewer: What were your reasons for coming to this country?
Anabel:     My mother was right here.
Interviewer: Did you want to come?
Anabel:     Not really, she bring me here.
Interviewer: When you came, did you like it?
Anabel:     No, because I was older and I didn't speak English and every-

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|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|              | body speak English. I was not able to go to school 'cause I was older, 16. |
| Interviewer: | Do your feelings about living in the US affect your interest in studying English? |
| Anabel:      | Yes, I think yes. In the beginning no—it wasn't interesting to me to learn English. I had other things on my mind. |

Furthermore, in their motivation for language study, those students who immigrated willingly appeared to continue to be driven by the desire to integrate rather than the instrumental rewards. On the other hand, length of residence in the US, consistent with previous research (Kakihara, 2006; Paper, 1990), had no particular bearing on participation in language learning.

### Fluctuation and Loss of Motivation

Motivation for language learning is not a steady phenomenon. During the interviews we looked in detail at fluctuations in students' reported interest in studying.

Daniel, for example, seemed generally motivated in studies from the point of arrival in the US. "As soon as I came here, I was like study, study, and after three months I was speaking good English. Not really, really good, but I could understand a lot." His interest, however, was later negatively affected by lack of understanding of the academic process.

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|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Daniel:      | Actually, it was a long way to ESL, just ESL, ESL. It was harder to get to the university. In the beginning, I was like, oh, my God, it's gonna be forever ESL. So in that time it [motivation] was decreased a little bit. |
| Interviewer: | Did you meet with a counselor?                           |
| Daniel:      | Yeah, with a counselor, with the teachers, and they showed me the way. |
| Interviewer: | Like which classes you needed to take?                   |
| Daniel:      | Uh-huh, that was most confusing.                         |

Lucia, who scored high on integrative motivation, drew her motivation from the society's negative attitudes toward her as a NNS immigrant.

Sometimes people give you attitude. They are pointing at you, like, "You don't speak English very well." I've had situation at work with people, with customers. They had told me, "You should go live in your country, you should learn English." That gave me the power to continue with my English and tell me, "At least, I'm trying to do something better. [You try to] go to school and learn Spanish." … It's not easy but at least I'm trying. That is what makes me continue in this challenge.

Dropping out or interruption in studies may not always signify lack of motivation. Patricia's example shows how work demands may negatively affect participation in learning.

Patricia:     I started learning English at LBCC ..., did two levels, 3-6
              months, and had to stop because of my job. They changed my
              schedule.
Interviewer:  Did you start at the beginning level?
Patricia:     Yes.
Interviewer:  What made you come back?
Patricia:     I have time now to learn English. I work usually 8-5:30.

Family situations may also influence a student's participation in the learning process.

Anabel:       I came here when I was 16. When I came here, I didn't study
              English, I start working.
Interviewer:  When did you begin to learn English?
Anabel:       Eight years ago, after I divorced from my marriage because first
              husband, he didn't want me to go to school. ...
Interviewer:  Why did you start?
Anabel:       I started a new job and I wanted to do something better, learn-
              ing computers, everything. And to be able to do all that you have
              to speak English. I started right here.
Interviewer:  How long have you been here now?
Anabel:       Five years. Before I start and I stop and I come back again.
Interviewer:  And this time you didn't stop?
Anabel:       No, all year, all year, I'm tired now. [Laughs]

Last, Lucia, who felt "embarrassed" because her English was not on par with that of her English-speaking friends, also returned to school after a break, before which she spent 3 years in school. The disjuncture described above brought her back.

### Experiencing and Overcoming Amotivation

The interviews provided an opportunity to explore student *amotivation*, operationalized in this study as a loss of interest in language learning—both the causes and the ways of addressing it. In answering the question "What makes you lose your interest in an ESL course?" study participants most commonly cited teaching style and grades.

Tomas:        The teacher sometimes, because the teacher is not good effort,
              or depends on his mood about the class, if it's interesting, if [he
              or she] is not encouraging.

Daniel:       When [the class] is like monotonous. When we just do the same
              stuff, little by little, and then go back. Sometimes it's like that.
              You came here to school, sometimes hard, because you have to
              learn some stuff, and you came here just telling you 3-3.5 hours
              and you saw the same stuff from the day before.

A bad grade was also reported to be a cause for amotivation. But was it really? Judging by the quotes below, a bad grade may sometimes serve as a motivator, rather than the other way around.

Tomas:      If I get a bad grade, maybe a little bit. Of course, if I get a bad grade, I have to study more.

Blanca:      The bad grade. Yes, that make me depressed. I think that's it, but I try to study. … At the same time, made me "You have to study more, you have to study more."
Interviewer: Were you ever at a point when you wanted to quit and just say, "You know what, I've had enough English"?
Blanca:      No. I always think I have to continue, I have to learn more.

Chibith, who at first claimed she never lost interest in a course, later asserted that her interest in the course subject (reading) supported her motivation. This corresponds to Keller's (1983) concept of relevance as a prerequisite for sustaining motivation.

Interviewer: This class, have you been interested in it all the way through?
Chibith:     Well, at the beginning it was kinda like shaky, I didn't really like it. But, 'cause I learn new things from the text, so I guess that's what interests me and make me like the class. I'm kinda into reading now, so that's what's gonna make me like the class.

The investigation of classroom participation brought to light an array of students' personal learning strategies that supported their language learning. Consistent with the literature review above, active deployment of these strategies visibly manifested motivation. During the lectures and a practice comprehension test, all students *took notes.* Rosa *repeated new words to herself,* practicing pronunciation as the teacher wrote them out on the board. She also *read ahead,* which became evident when the teacher asked who had read the upcoming chapter. Chibith's strategy was to *highlight important material* in the book rather than write it down. Julio and Anabel *studied the material during the class break* while other students *gathered by the map* discussing geography—reading content that day.

During the interviews, students also reported a wide variety of personal strategies for language learning. Watching TV in English, listening to English music and radio, and communicating with English speakers were mentioned most often. Here is, for instance, how some of them answered the question "If you had a friend coming from your native country, what would you tell him/her to do to learn English faster, better?"

Daniel:      Try to read what you're gonna learn the next day, read it and understand everything: Look [up] the language, the new words. It does really happen when you come to class, you pay attention, you understand everything. One little word can change every-

thing. That's really important for me. If I read before the class, I look up for the new words and when the explanation comes from the teacher, it's easier. I understand better. 'Cause one little word can change everything.

Tomas:       Study. Just not in the school. You have to watch TV in English, listen to the radio, talk to people about in English, and try to think in English. … The school is not enough. I have to listen to the radio, to make more friends, and try to speak all the time English. … I like to read in English. But another books, not these [course-assigned] books. Other kind of books, watch some programs.

Lucia's interview revealed an interesting connection between goals for language learning and the employed learning strategies:

One of my goals here is to go to the university. So I always try to do study myself and read in English. Even sometimes, you know, it take me long time to finish one book, because I have to stop 'cause I don't understand what phrase and what word, but that's the way I have improved that.

### Conclusions

This study focused on the motivational processes within a group of adult immigrant English learners engaged in advanced academic ESL study. The results suggest that adult immigrants choose to engage in advanced academic language-learning programs in order to, first and foremost, join the L2 culture and community. Many such English language learners function in a bilingual social context, admire the dominant language culture, and are aware that their achievement of projected identity and professional goals in this society depends on high-level proficiency in their second language. Learning motivation can be sometimes traced to a particular disjuncture between the student's L2 proficiency and the needs arising from the student's social identity or context. Immigration history also appears to affect student motivation for language learning.

Learning among the surveyed advanced ESL students was found to be driven by internal motives, often connected to specific life goals outside of the education realm. In this continuum, education, including language education, served as a necessary transitional step on the way to achieving students' self-established goals.

Instrumental reasons, including communication needs within the existing and projected bilingual and L2 monolingual communities of practice, were quite important to this group of students. Yet the integrative motives for language learning among the surveyed group of participants appeared to equal, if not outweigh, the instrumental ones.

Motivation for language learning among the surveyed students proved to be an unsteady, fluctuating behavior, affected by the multiple goals and multiple contexts of the students' lives. The course itself—the instructor's teaching

style, classroom activities, and grading—appeared to be the dominant reason for such fluctuation, including amotivation. As a result, one cannot assume that a highly motivated student will remain such throughout the educational process. However, knowledge of these factors, for example, the importance of student advising, could be important in ensuring sustained participation in language education.

### Ideas for Future Research

Given the general lack of research in applied linguistics about adult ESL student motivation, I view this group case study as an exploratory endeavor intended to begin the process of understanding of the phenomenon. The multimethod model of research used in this project produced findings that, I believe, accurately represent motivational processes among students taking a particular ESL class. Using only one method, for example, a survey, or focusing on one specific behavior, for example, classroom participation, would have failed to reveal the multidimensional nature of motivation of these students. However, the study's limited sample makes it difficult to extrapolate the results to the entire ESL adult population engaged in advanced academic learning.

Future studies could expand the knowledge about adult ESL student motivation in several significant ways. First, a comparison of motivational processes among the successful, that is participating, students with those who left the studies could highlight the reasons for amotivation. Second, the use of a larger sample for a quantitative study (something already done in L2 motivation studies among other groups of language learners) would help maximize the validity of the study results and possibly reveal additional reasons for participation. Last, the study of practical implications of engaging student motivation in learning, including the assessment of the relevance of course content to the student goals, would seem beneficial to the TESOL practitioners.

### Author

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# Appendix A
## Demographic and Supporting Information

| | *Anabel* | *Blanca* | *Chibith* | *Daniel* | *Ines* | *Julio* | *Lucia* | *Patricia* | *Rosa* | *Tomas* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L1 | Spanish | Spanish | Khmer | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish |
| Country of origin | Mexico | El Salvador | US | Mexico | Mexico | El Salvador | Ecuador | Mexico | Mexico | Mexico |
| Years in the US | 15 | 6 | All life | 6 | 15 | 4.5 | 5 | 6 | 11 | 1 |
| Gender | F | F | F | M | F | M | F | F | F | M |
| Age group | 30-34 | 25-29 | 17-24 | 17-24 | 35-39 | 35-39 | 30-34 | 30-34 | 17-24 | 25-29 |
| Children | Y (2) | N | Y (1) | N | Y (3) | Y (1) | N | N | Y (1) | N |
| Married | Y | Y | N | N | N | Y | N | Y | Y | N |
| Caretaker of older parents or relatives | N | N | N | Y | N | N | N | Y | N | N |
| Employed | Y | Y | N | N (temp disability) | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Primary language spoken at current workplace | L2 | L2 | n/a | L1+L2 | n/a | L1 | L1+L2 | L1 | L1+L2 | L1+L2 |
| Education completed (n = native country; US = in US; HS = high-school diploma) | n: 9 grades | n: HS + US: HS | US: HS | n: HS+ 1 year of college | n: 6 grades | n: HS | n: HS, BA in HR | n: 9 grades | US: HS (GED) | n: HS + BA in Chem. Eng. |
| Projected long-term career goal | Business/admin. assistant | Dental assistant | Radiology | Business owner | Warehouse data entry | Production manager | Realtor or HR manager | Computer systems specialist | Business administrator | Engineer |
| Level of education expected for this job (AA = community college degree; BS = university degree; Cert = certificate) | AA + BS | AA + Cert. (1 year, Dental assistant) | AA | AA + Cert. (Business) | Vocational training | AA + Cert. (Accounting) | Cert. (Real estate) | Computer systems specialist | AA | AA + BS |
| Primary language spoken at goal workplace | L2 | L2 | L2 | L1+L2 | L2 | L1 | L1+L2 | L1+L2 | L2 | L2 |

# Appendix B
## Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Where do you use your native language and English? With whom and how often?
2. How would you describe your reasons for learning English? Have they changed over time?
3. Has anything happened in your personal life that has influenced your interest in studying English?
4. What were your reasons for coming to this country? How do you feel now about your move? Do your feelings about living in the US affect your interest in studying English?
5. How important is it for you to do well in your English studies?
6. How do you measure your success or failure in it?
7. How do you want to be seen by other Americans as a result of learning English?

*Part 1. Instrumental Orientation Motives*

**Section 1. Professional and educational goals**

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|-----|----------|------|--------|----------|
| 1.1 | I study ESL at this college because I want to get a better job in my current profession. | 4.40 | 88% | 1.20 |
| 1.2 | I study ESL at this college because I want to find a job in a different profession. | 4.60 | 92% | 0.49 |
| 1.3 | I need to complete this ESL program to enter an educational program to prepare for the job of my choice. | 4.70 | 94% | 0.64 |
| 1.4 | I study ESL at this college because my employer requires it. (reverse coded) | 2.90 | 58% | 1.37 |
| 1.5 | Proficiency in English will have financial benefits for me. | 4.40 | 88% | 1.20 |
| | Total section mean | 4.20 | 84% | 0.43 |

**Section 2. Communication needs with valued others**

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|-----|----------|------|--------|----------|
| 2.1 | I am learning English to be able to communicate with my children. | 2.44 | 49% | 1.83 |
| 2.2 | I am learning English to be able to communicate with my relatives who speak it. | 3.50 | 70% | 1.50 |
| 2.3 | I am learning English to be able to communicate with friends who speak it. | 4.60 | 92% | 0.66 |
| 2.4 | I am learning English to be able to communicate with my boss at my current job. | 4.11 | 82% | 1.29 |
| 2.5 | I am learning English to be able to communicate with my coworkers at my current job. | 3.89 | 78% | 1.37 |
| | Total section mean | 3.77 | 75% | 0.99 |

**Section 3. Encouragement for language learning from relevant others**

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|-----|----------|------|--------|----------|
| 3.1 | Most of my friends speak English. | 2.90 | 58% | 1.14 |
| 3.2 | My spouse or parent wants to me to learn English. | 1.78 | 36% | 1.13 |
| 3.3 | My boss at work wants me to learn English. | 2.22 | 44% | 1.75 |
| 3.4 | Other people whose opinion is important to me want me to learn English. | 2.60 | 52% | 1.91 |
| 3.5 | I am learning English because I want to make my parents happy. | 1.50 | 30% | 1.50 |
| | Total section mean | 2.16 | 43% | 1.00 |

## Part 2. Integrative Orientation Motives

### Section 4. Attitudes toward L2 speakers and culture

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|-----|----------|------|--------|----------|
| 4.1 | I am learning English to communicate with English-speaking Americans. | 4.50 | 90% | 0.50 |
| 4.2 | I like the culture of English-speaking Americans. | 3.80 | 76% | 1.25 |
| 4.3 | I want to become part of the English-speaking Americans. | 4.10 | 82% | 1.14 |
| 4.4 | In the future, I want to speak English most of the time in all situations. | 4.30 | 86% | 1.49 |
| 4.5 | I am learning English because I want to learn more about the culture and traditions of English-speaking Americans. | 3.40 | 68% | 1.50 |
| 4.6 | You cannot be a real American if you don't speak English. | 2.30 | 46% | 1.68 |
| | Total section mean | 3.73 | 75% | 0.78 |

### Section 5. Volition of immigration to the US

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|-----|----------|------|--------|----------|
| 5.1 | I wanted to come to the US. | 3.56 | 71% | 1.50 |
| 5.2 | I came here mostly because of my family. (reverse coded) | 2.44 | 49% | 1.71 |
| 5.3 | I wish I had not come to the US and stayed in my native country. (reverse coded) | 3.89 | 78% | 1.52 |
| 5.4 | I want to return to my country of origin. (reverse coded) | 3.56 | 71% | 1.57 |
| 5.5 | I want to stay in the US for the rest of my life. | 3.38 | 68% | 1.80 |
| | Total section mean | 3.47 | 69% | 1.32 |

### Section 6. Enjoyment of language learning as a cultural activity

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|-----|----------|------|--------|----------|
| 6.1 | I would take this class even if it were not required. | 3.60 | 72% | 1.36 |
| 6.2 | I really enjoy learning English. | 4.70 | 94% | 0.46 |
| 6.3 | I enjoy using English outside of class when I get a chance. | 4.90 | 98% | 0.30 |
| 6.4 | I always look forward to coming to this class. | 3.90 | 78% | 1.22 |
| 6.5 | I feel nervous and uncomfortable in this class. (reverse coded) | 4.00 | 80% | 1.25 |
| | Total section mean | 4.21 | 84% | 0.52 |

## Section 7. Totals

| Totals | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total mean for Part I: Instrumental motives Mean percentage | 3.38 | 68% | 0.39 |
| Percentage ratio vs. the other orientation | 47% | | |
| Total mean for Part 2: Integrative Motives Mean percentage | 3.80 | 76% | 0.43 |
| Percentage ratio vs. the other orientation | 53% | | |

## Part 3. Perception of Motivational Intensity

## Section 8. Motivational intensity

| No. | Question | Mean | Mean % | St. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.1 | Completing the ESL program is a very high priority to me. | 4.60 | 92% | 0.66 |
| 7.2 | I plan to stay in the course to the end. | 4.70 | 94% | 0.46 |
| 7.3 | I work hard in this class even when I don't like what we are doing. | 4.00 | 80% | 1.25 |
| 7.4 | When I am in this class, I participate actively. | 4.00 | 80% | 1.18 |
| 7.5 | Even when the course materials are boring, I always finish my work. | 3.70 | 74% | 1.19 |
| 7.6 | It is very important to me to get good grades in this class. | 4.80 | 96% | 0.40 |
| 7.7 | I often feel lazy and bored when I study for this class. (reverse coded) | 3.60 | 72% | 0.80 |
| 7.8 | When I don't like the activities in an ESL course, I consider dropping it. (reverse coded) | 3.80 | 76% | 1.17 |
| | Total section mean | 4.15 | 83% | 0.54 |

### Appendix D
### Classroom-Based Student Information

| | Anabel | Blanca | Chibith | Daniel | Ines | Julio | Lucia | Patricia | Rosa | Tomas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attendance: missed class sessions out of 34 total | 3 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Attendance: late arrivals or absences in the 6 observed classes | | 1 | 4 | 5 | | | 4 | | 3 | |
| Teacher-initiated student turns (volunteer answers to teacher's questions) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 3 |
| Student-initiated turns: clarification | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Student-initiated turns: new information | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 3 |
| Final course grade | D | D | C | C | D | C | B | D | C | B |