



## An analysis of demotivating factors of Iranian translation students in translating written texts

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### ABSTRACT

Demotivation, as important concept in psychology, is in fact the dark side of motivation. Research into foreign language learners' demotivation for their weaknesses in translation practice has not been touched by the translation scholars. To this end, the researchers distributed an open-ended questionnaire to 112 students majoring in translation studies at Ghuchan Azad University and Mashhad Imam Reza University. Having categorized the responses, they found that the most commonly cited factors included lack of job (0.24), teaching method (0.20), a boring task (0.12), teacher feedback (0.10), insufficient knowledge of vocabulary (0.8), and lack of group work (0.5). No effect on general English, confusion in translation courses, and lack of concentration were the least commonly mentioned factors. The factors show that students need extrinsic motivation or instrumental motivation to pursue their studies or at least to exert enough effort and perseverance in their courses.

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### Introduction

Translation research has undergone major changes during the last two decades, addressing psychological issues in translation (Mason, 2008), and for that the academic discipline of translation aims at investigating emotive factors and individual differences in translation (Miyake & Friedman, 1998). However, little attention has been given to the psychological traits of the learners majoring in translation. An important but underrated psychological factor is the matter of experiencing loss of motivation. As a matter of fact, researchers working on L2 motivation have conventionally been fond of the positive impacts that create interest in learning and assist in supporting it. By tradition, motivation has been taken and explored as a complex trait including different influences with a positive effect. Motivational elements have been seen as the key to energizing ongoing action (Ely, 1986; Dörnyei, 1998, 2003). Nevertheless, there is another side of motivation that has been underrated so far. Just as one can figure out reasons that have positive effects on motivation, there are also those that have a damaging effect on motivation. These influences are referred to as demotivating influences. According to Gile (1992, cited in Baker, 1998), three causes of errors in translation include: 1) lack of knowledge, 2) lack of methodology, and 3) lack of motivation. Rather, if a learner has totally lost his or her motivation, this state is known as amotivation.

The major reason to carry out the present study was the originality of the topic. Given the insufficient evidence and information about demotivation, more in depth research is needed to be done. A distinct study is also needed to explore demotivation itself. The worth of this study is to offer much necessary information on demotivation more specifically, and to generate information on the variety of demotivating factors. The information obtained will be classified into linguistic, social, cultural, economic, family- related factors. The present study, as an initial attempt, aimed at examining this neglected area of L2 motivation, demotivation in translation studies. It is worthwhile to investigate what the demotivating factors are that

dispirit learners in translating written texts. Translation students at undergraduate level mostly complain about the difficulty of translation process. They believe that it is complex in terms of linguistic, psychological, and social psychological factors. To guarantee this, the participants have choices and they are not led in any direction in their answers. All the factors reported are included in the analysis (Dörnyei, 2001). To this end, the present study specifically attempts to answer the question: *What are the demotivating factors in translation studies?*

### Literature Review

Trang and Richard (2007) conducted a case study in Vietnam. They came to the conclusion that demotivation was a determining factor in EFL learning. One of the results obtained from the study that is in harmony with the preceding findings is that students ascribe their demotivation primarily to teachers. The results reveal that students' demotivation or lack of motivation because of particular conditions is a chief trouble in foreign language learning settings like Vietnam.

Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) studied particularly the external elements that Japanese high school students may come across and that lead to the students' reduction of motivation. A pool of 112 learners of English participated in the study from three private universities in Tokyo and Shizuoka, Japan. The subjects were required to fill out the questionnaire on the Internet. Employing exploratory factor analysis, five constructs were emerged including: (a) Course Books, (b) Inadequate School Facilities, (c) Test Scores, (d) Non-communicative Methods, and (e) Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles.

Falout, Elwood and Hood (2009) investigated affective states and learning outcomes regarding demotivation. To look into the demotivating factors in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japan, data were gathered from 900 university EFL learners and the linkage between preceding demotivating experiences and present proficiencies. Emotional factors and competence to self-regulate learning were compared among learners with varying academic interests, experiences, and proficiencies. Demotivating factors were grouped into three

categories: external conditions of the learning environment, internal conditions of the learner, and reactive behaviors to demotivating experiences.

Gorham and Christophel (1992) discovered that students perceive negative teacher behavior as one of the demotivators in class. The two other major categories of demotivators were found to be context factors and structure/ format factors. Oxford (1994) discovered four causes of demotivation: "The teacher's personal relationship with the student, the teacher's attitude towards the course or the material, style conflicts between teachers and students, and the nature of the classroom activities" (p. 19). Grammar and reading based English language content along with grammar translation methodology in high school causes students to feel incompetent in the development of their foreign language abilities.

In the domain of L2 context, two important studies have been undertaken. Dörnyei (1998) found nine areas that could cause demotivation: "the teacher (personality, commitment, competence, telling method), inadequate school facilities (group is too big or not the right level; frequent change of teachers), reduced self-confidence (experience of failure or lack of success), negative attitudes towards the L2, compulsory nature of L2 study, interference of another foreign language being studied, negative attitude towards L2 community, attitudes of group members and course book used in the language class" (p. 32). Following the guidelines proposed by Dörnyei (1998), the present study set out to construct and validate the Demotivation in Translation Scale (DTS) to be used as an instrument for conducting further research in the domain of translation studies.

### **Alternative Theoretical Approaches to Second Language Motivation**

#### **Self-determination Theory**

Among the most powerful trends in the field of L2 motivation has been the *self-determination theory* proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). The theory entails three major categories: *intrinsic motivation*, *extrinsic motivation* and *self-determination*. Intrinsic motivation is grounded upon inner desires for competence and self-determination. It stimulates a range of behaviors and the prime rewards for it are the experiences of efficacy and independence. It means that an individual who is intrinsically motivated experiences interest and pleasure and feels knowledgeable and self-determined. Instead, a person who is extrinsically motivated has an external locus of control, that is, a person acts so as to obtain an extrinsic reward or to meet the terms with an external limitation.

Consequently, the action is not something that is made for the reason that it is motivating but something that is done to obtain an external reward. These rewards can be, e.g. financial rewards, awards, tokens or prizes and even prevention of penalty may act as a reward. Self-determination, in turn, refers to a quality of performance that includes the experience of alternative, in other words, "the experience of an internal perceived locus of causality" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 38). More specifically, self-determination refers to the capacity to decide and have those decisions determinate one's actions, instead of being obsessed by some forces or pressures.

Nevertheless, self-determination is more than a competence: it is also a must. That is, self-determination results in creating competencies and this is an aid to accommodate with the social environment. The fundamental idea of the theory is rooted in four doctrines. Initially, people possess an intrinsic need for self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Secondly, people show an intrinsic need to be capable and to master most favorable challenges. Thirdly, pertinent to behavior, there are three

potential aspects to the events and they each have a functional meaning. The informational aspect makes easy an internal perceived locus of causality and thus, improves intrinsic motivation. The controlling aspect paves the way for an external perceived locus of causality and therefore, lessens intrinsic motivation (Christophel & Gorham, 1995). What facilitates perceived ineffectiveness is the amotivating aspect that also undermines intrinsic motivation. How much these aspects are remarkable to a person certifies the significance of the event. Finally, the three aspects immediately described are related to intrapersonal events too. Likewise, while internally controlling and internally amotivating events lessen it, the internally informational events facilitate intrinsic motivation, (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

#### **The Expanded Model**

Oxford and Shearin (1994) have influenced the continuing debate on L2 motivation by intensifying Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. To them, the established model has some aspects that are perplexing or problematic. For example, Gardner (1985) proposed that model that a person who acquires a L2 in order to become a member of the L2 community or to achieve a practical objective, he excludes some of the motivational orientations like cultural curiosity or intellectual challenge (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). The dispute makes sense, allowing for a person who desires to learn Latin. That individual is not likely to learn the language in order to become a member of the community. In addition, Oxford and Shearin have noted another ignored aspect in Gardner's (1985) model: Motivation plays a different role in a foreign language environment and in a L2 environment. Put it another way, a foreign language learner is not bounded by inspiration the same way that a L2 learner is, for this reason, a foreign language learner is more likely to be motivated by an instrumental need for achievement (Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

Oxford and Shearin (1994) highlighted that "it was not their intention to challenge the prevailing concept of L2 motivation but to expand the model" (p. 25). They put forward that the conventional model by Gardner (1985) should be taken further by incorporating assistance from potentially helpful motivational and developmental theories in it. Oxford and Shearin (1994) would develop the model to comprise need theories (e.g., job satisfaction and need for achievement), expectation-value theories (e.g. instrumentality), equity theories (ratio of a learner's contributions to the outcome) and reinforcement theories (receiving intrinsic or extrinsic rewards).

#### **A Social Constructivist Model**

Williams and Burden (1997) explained their model of L2 motivation as "cognitive and constructivist, socially contextualised and dynamically interactive" (p. 137). The essential idea of their model is that the central constituent of motivation is making the decision to act. If an individual has sturdy reasons for taking part in some action, he or she may not essentially do anything about it and this is why the emphasis is on this phase. The decisions are taken on issues, for instance, whether to do something or how much time and effort to exert on it. Additionally, these decisions are founded on the learner's own construction of the world and also internal attributes that he or she brings to the situation contribute to it, e.g. his or her character or self-confidence. Sequentially, the internal attributes mirror the learner's viewpoint, society and the adjacent culture (Williams & Burden, 1997). Hence, internal factors and external factors impact the learner's decision. The internal factors embrace aspects like developmental age and stage, gender, attitudes and intrinsic interest in the activity. On the contrary,

the external factors are composed of important others, nature of interaction with significant others, learning environment and broader context, which refers to different surroundings, e.g., family networks or cultural norms.

Williams and Burden (1997) suggested a model by which motivation can be either intrinsic, it means, doing something because it is pleasant in itself, or extrinsic, it means, doing something to attain other ends. Moreover, a learner has to be stimulated, regularly by curiosity or interest so as to get motivated, and he or she has to continue that stimulation (Williams & Burden, 1997). The model indeed highlights the significance of being in control of one's actions and believing in one's abilities. Besides, diverse motivational styles affect greatly motivational outcomes. An individual who desires to learn an activity by putting more effort is more likely to remain motivated, while an individual who ascribes his or her failure to lack of intelligence easily loses his or her motivation highlighting the role of negative factors or demotivating factors.

#### **Demotivation vs. Amotivation**

Because the idea of demotivation cannot be connected to every unwilling learner, Dornyei (2001) has distinguished at least three negative factors that cannot be known as demotives. Initially, there are influential distractions, e.g. watching television in place of doing one's homework. These cannot be considered as demotives since they do not bear negative value. For this reason, instead of reducing motivation, they divert a learner by presenting a more attractive alternative. Secondly, slow loss of interest cannot be seen as a demotive because demotives are particular factors or incidents that lessen motivation on a single event. Thirdly, there are conditions when a learner recognizes the trouble or high expenses of pursuing the purpose. This means, for instance, that a learner understands that classes take place too late in the evening or that the studying is too lengthy. This cannot be regarded as demotivation because it involves internal processes of deliberation and no external inducements are present (Dornyei, 1998). If someone else persuaded the learner that the costs for continuing the goal are too high, the situation would be different. Afterward, this other person could be regarded as an external factor demotivating the learner (Song, 2005).

Dornyei (2001) comments that demotivation does not mean that a learner has lost his or her motivation totally. In contrast, the positive influences that first made up the motivational base of behavior can still be there. For example, a learner may still be greatly motivated to learn English, it being a significant world language, even if his or her teacher were ineffectual or malevolent. Amotivation is a situation in which the learner loses his or her motivation wholly. The differentiation between these two related notions is that when an amotivated learner is someone who has found the general outcome expectations to be impractical for some reason, a demotivated learner is someone whose motivation has decreased due to some external factor.

Yet, in the span of time, demotivation can lead to amotivation (Dornyei, 2001, 2005), that is, a series of demotivating experiences can lead to a total loss of motivation, i.e. amotivation. Consider, for instance, a learner whose English teacher constantly humiliates him or her on purpose. It is likely that because of these nonstop demotivating experiences, this learner slowly loses interest in the language. Nonetheless, if the demotives diminish for reason, the level of motivation can come back to normal. For example, such a learner described above could regain his or her interest in English if the harriving teacher were replaced with someone else.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The study set out to carry out at Ghuchan Azad University, and Mashad Imam Reza University, located at the northeast of Iran. The classes selected were fairly large and mixed. The subjects participating in this study were university students majoring in translation students. The students were between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> semesters. A pool of 112 students participates in this research project. The classes are selected randomly.

### **Instrumentation**

An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather data as the instrument (appendix A). A task sheet was distributed to the subjects consisting of the topic and the instructions for the task and background questions regarding name, sex, age, and term. To reduce the number of blank sheets, a small introduction to the topic was written and then came the instructions. The subjects are just required to mention in their own words about issues that they feel have a negative influence on their motivation to learn English, i.e. demotivating factors.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

To the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has been carried out in the context of Iran to identify the major factors to which students majoring in English translation refer regarding demotivating factors. Since qualitative research are in line with grounded theory and anti-positive philosophies, the kind of methodology employed in this study was that of interpretive approach to analyzing data gathered by means of a simple open-ended questionnaire. Participants are allowed to write as many reasons as they know and they were asked to reflect on their experience that had discouraged them from learning English.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative part of the current study starts with recording all the demotivating factors that emerge from the data. The researchers gathered them as detailed as well as the descriptive information about them as possible. After that, through tracing commonalities and underscoring patterns across them, all the demotivating factors were examined thematically. It attempts to interpret the meanings that the respondents intend, and to allow categories to emerge from the data. The resulting categories were then tabulated according to the factors that discouraged them from translating (Dornyei, 2007). Then, the most commonly cited factors for each of the variables are determined to find out the students' demotivating factors in learning English.

## **Results**

### **Demotivating Factors in Translation**

To provide an answer for the first research question, eighteen demotivating factors emerged from the data (see Table 4.1). Altogether, 225 factors emerged from the open-ended questionnaire and they were categorized into eighteen factors. The results from the SPSS Software for Windows version 18 yielded interesting frequency. The most commonly cited factors included lack of job (0.24), teaching method (0.20), a boring task (0.12), teacher feedback (0.10), insufficient knowledge of vocabulary (0.8), and lack of group work (0.5). The most commonly-cited factor was concerned with lack of job. The next one was teaching methods. No effect on general English, confusion in translation courses, and lack of concentration were the least commonly mentioned factors.

## **Discussion and implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

The few previous studies have shown some shared discourses regarding the demotivating factors. For example, in the previous studies, the role of the teacher has been

documented to be a determining factor in the process of demotivation (Dornyei, 1998, Modarresi et. al., 2011).

**Table 4.1 Demotivation factors in translation**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	lack of job	55	24.2	24.4
	teaching method	47	20.7	20.9
	a boring task	29	12.8	12.9
	teacher feedback	23	10.1	10.2
	insufficient knowledge of vocabulary	20	8.8	8.9
	lack of group work	12	5.3	5.3
	unfairness in marks	7	3.1	3.1
	uninteresting topics	6	2.6	2.7
	difficulty of the texts	5	2.2	2.2
	inadequate knowledge of English grammar	4	1.8	1.8
	lack of good textbook for translation courses	4	1.8	1.8
	a time-consuming task	3	1.3	1.3
	lack of expert teachers for each course	3	1.3	1.3
	using bilingual dictionary	2	.9	.9
	translator identity	2	.9	.9
	no effect on General English	1	.4	.4
	confusion in translation courses	1	.4	.4
lack of concentration	1	.4	.4	
Total	225	99.1	100.0	
Missing System	2	.9		
Total	227	100.0		

The researchers also take the contextual and socio-cultural factors into due consideration. They did so through the distribution of open-ended questionnaire and consultation with other experts to find out as many factors as possible and come up with the most frequent ones. Factors such as Lack of job, phobia from grammar, and lack of teacher's feedback are among the few as indicated in the results obtained from the questionnaire. As a matter of fact, some factors come from the outside or the environment such as socioeconomic factors and some results from the inside or the students themselves such as lack of effort.

To explore the research question: 'What are the demotivating factors in translation studies?', the researchers categorized and tabulated the data and came up with 225 factors emerged from the 112 participants majoring in translation studies. The system missed only 2 factors out of 227 responses. The researchers categorized the factors under 18 major categories. Indeed, they tried to use the same label for factors that overlap each other and after final editing, he entered the relevant data into the SPSS Software for further analysis. The researchers cited the most commonly cited factors as follows: 1) lack of job (0.24), 2) teaching method (0.20), 3) a boring task (0.12), 4) teacher feedback (0.10), 5) insufficient knowledge of vocabulary (0.8), and 6) lack of group work (0.5). Fortunately, two out of the four factors that cover the newly-designed items in the validated scale are named as lack of job and teacher knowledge. Indeed, lack of job or unemployment is a common problem for nearly all graduated students. However, the factors shows that students need extrinsic motivation or instrumental motivation to pursue their studies or at least to exert enough effort and perseverance in their courses. These factors are discussed in details in the next section.

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