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**The role of the mother tongue language assistant  
in students' motivation**

A case study in a University in the North of Italy

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Ai miei genitori Emilia e Dezio,  
mia sorella Rossella  
e a Davide

« Almost everything a teacher does in the classroom  
has a motivational influence on students,  
which makes teacher behavior  
a powerful ‘motivational tool’ »

Zoltán Dörnyei

Teaching and Researching Motivation

2001, page 120

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## ABSTRACT

This work examines the role of the mother-tongue language assistant in university students' motivation and analyse which are the main motivational strategies assistants adopt. There is widely proven evidence that learner's motivation is a fundamental factor for a rewarding learning experience but the importance of the assistant in this process has not been as much investigated. My thesis aims to close this gap, considering specifically the university context. The dissertation is articulated in two parts. In the first part I go deep into some of the main theories about motivation in learning that I consider relevant for my purpose. Then I present some case studies researchers have conducted on this topic. The second part of my work is dedicated to the field research carried out in an University in the North of Italy, where several mother-tongue language assistants were interviewed. The interview investigated the strategies the assistants implement mostly so as to motivate their students to learn and the ones they usually ignore. On the one hand, some language assistants I interviewed assumed that university students do not need to be motivated because they have personally chosen to study their specific subject at the university, thus they are autonomous learners and assistants are required to give them only some learning advice. On the other hand, numerous interviewees highlighted the importance of the language assistant in encouraging their students' motivational processes, given that the biggest motivation comes from within the learner and assistants should work to incentivize it. Therefore many assistants explained that they try to create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere in the classroom where people feel they are respected and valued. In order to achieve a more complete overview of the situation a triangulation of data was performed: a satisfaction questionnaire, Questionnaire 1, about the language assistants' courses was administered to the university students and the resulting data were compared with the previous ones. Moreover a second questionnaire, Questionnaire 2, was administered to students participating in the French *tutorato* I held from April to end May 2017, concerning the perception learners have about the motivational teaching practice of the tutor. So, I could compare the results I obtained from Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 and I concluded that learners, in both cases, *lettorato* and *tutorato*, especially demand a more personalized teaching proposal that is not often possible to implement because of the numerous classes; however language assistants explained they always commit themselves to choosing the most adequate motivational strategies to adopt according to the specific learning situation.

# Introduction

Motivation is proven to be the main factor leading learners to have a successful experience: it assures the push to begin learning a second or foreign language and the driving force to overcome the difficulties of learning it and accomplish the goal.

So without an adequate motivation even a student having a strong aptitude for languages cannot achieve the objectives the course has.

Therefore I opted for studying in depth motivation and specifically one of the most relevant aspects related to it: the role of the teacher in improving their learners' motivation.

Given that literature does not present consolidated researches concerning the role mother tongue language assistants play in motivating their students at university, I tried to fill this gap. I investigated this aspect at a University in the North of Italy, by means of interviews with language assistants and a questionnaire I administered to learners attending *lettorato*, thus I obtained the point of view of assistants and students concerning the motivational strategies implemented, and I could perform a triangulation. Furthermore I administered another questionnaire to learners participating in the *tutorato* I held at the same University in the second semester 2017 to evaluate their appreciation.

I addressed some main research questions asking assistants which motivating strategies they usually implement or neglect and what is their opinion regarding the ranking formulated by Dörnyei ( the *Ten Commandments*); moreover I surveyed whether language assistants are sensitive to their students' motivational needs. Finally I researched what similarities and differences are between the motivational strategies' implementation perceived by students of *lettorato* and of *tutorato*.

My investigation shows that, in both cases, learners have different opinions regarding the teaching practice of their assistants / tutor and I found some interesting points I will here anticipate.

A good learner should be driven by a strong inner motivation which the language assistant shall keep alive by choosing the proper motivational strategies to implement. Almost all the ten commandments for motivating language learners are relevant according to the interviewed assistants, but each of them is adequate to a specific learning situation: assistants are requested to make the right choice.

Moreover, language learners demand that their language assistants personalize the teaching practice more than they normally do, but assistants can hardly implement this strategy because their classes are too numerous and adapting their choices to everyone's needs at university is often impossible.

What assistants can and should do is facilitate learning by supporting their students to face the challenges this path presents and overcome the obstacles they find, in order to ensure learners have a successful and rewarding learning experience.

Furthermore incentivizing *tutorato* with small groups of students might be a good way to respond to the needs students have to be listened to, guided, and helped to better understand the contents explained in *lettorato*.

These findings, which are briefly mentioned here, confirm the importance mother tongue language assistants (and tutors) have in their learners' motivation and prove that their role should be valued more than it is at university nowadays.

# Part 1

## CHAPTER 1.

### Theoretical framework:

### Five fundamental theories about motivation in language learning

This chapter is dedicated to the explanation of some theories regarding motivation that I found interesting for my purpose: all of them might be interpreted in the light of the importance of teachers' behaviour in language learning.

Among the numerous existing motivation theories in the field of language acquisition, I have chosen five that I believe teachers should take into particular account. They are:

- Gardner and Lambert 's *socio-psychological theory* (1972)
- Deci and Ryan's *self-determination theory* (1985)
- Weiner's *attribution theory* ( 1992)
- Schumann's *neurobiological model* ( 1998)
- Dörnyei's *4-step motivational teaching practice* ( 2001)

In the following sections I will show how these scholars' works are relevant to my research.

### 1.1 Gardner and Lambert 's *socio-psychological theory*

In the seventies Gardner and Lambert considered the specific bilingual context of Canada, a country where both English and French are spoken as mother tongues, and they

elaborated a new theory regarding the reason why each of the two communities - the English-speaking one and the French-speaking one – are driven to learning the other community's language.

The two scholars observed that the second language ( L2 ) is a mediating factor between the two different ethnolinguistic groups and that the force leading those people to learn the language the other community speaks is not only to understand their culture but to integrate. Therefore Gardner and Lambert introduced the term *integrative motive* as a key element in motivating Canadian citizens to acquire their second language.

In 1985 Gardner considered the existence of another plausible goal people might have when learning a second language. He called it *instrumental orientation*. It consists in aiming at enhancing language mastery for utilitarian reasons such as getting a better job or a higher salary.

Basically, Gardner and Lambert's theory conceives two fundamental concepts: *motivation* and *orientation*. This last can be *integrative* or *instrumental*. «The role of orientation is to help to arouse motivation and direct it towards a set of goals either with a strong interpersonal quality (integrative) or a strong practical quality ( instrumental )» (Dörnyei, 2001: 49).

Gardner observed that Canadian learners' *attitudes* towards their second language were positively addressed given that these people feel a strong desire and show a determined will to learn the language the other community speaks and understand its culture, when the objective is integration. On the contrary people pushed by an instrumental orientation were not as involved in learning as the above mentioned learners. The scholar concluded that integrative orientation is the strongest factor leading people to learn their second language ( L2).

Furthermore Gardner considers the *socio-educational model* as particularly important for language education. This is specific for each student and it consists of individual factors such as age, gender and learning history, the context where the language acquisition has taken place and finally the outcomes of the learning process. The socio-educational model explains the attitude the learner has when approaching the language learning.

The model above should be taken into strong consideration in a learner-centred teaching practice where the teacher teaches lessons adequate to meet his / her students learning needs. Responding to each student's educational necessities pertains both to the case of integrative and instrumental orientation.

The integrative orientation case requires the teacher to propose a lesson leading their students to the knowledge of the main cultural aspects characterising the people they meet every day and the foreign country they live in, given that they study the language spoken there as a second language, thus make them integrate better in this context.

The same is true as for the instrumental orientation case where teachers are called to teach their students how to deal especially with job matters.

Given these two orientations - integrative and instrumental- learners may have in approaching the acquisition of their second language, the teacher is required to shape his/her teaching methods and materials so as to meet and increase their students' initial motivation to learn.

## **1.2 Deci and Ryan's *self-determination theory***

The relevance of planning a lesson, defining the specific teaching goals and adopting adequate techniques and strategies aimed at encouraging learners to be motivated in learning is based as well on the *self-determination theory* Deci and Ryan devised in 1985.

I will briefly describe its main points and explain its importance as for my research.

The theory is an elaboration of R. J. Vallerand's theoretical distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In the educational field, *intrinsic motivation* drives people to learn something they find interesting or enjoyable, while *extrinsic motivation* deals with the feeling to be pushed to learn a subject to an end such as to receive a good mark or to avoid punishment.

Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory «is framed in terms of social and environmental factors that facilitates versus undermines intrinsic motivation » ( Ryan and Deci, 2000: 58). Some contextual conditions affect the learning process as regards the student's motivation. These conditions are, for example, the class and home environment. I will focus here on the first one.

As for class environment, I mean particularly the role of teachers in enhancing their learners' intrinsic motivation. Two needs should be satisfied for that purpose; they are:

- the feeling of competence
- the sense of autonomy

The *feeling of competence* is the awareness of being up to the learning situation and competent. It guarantees a higher self-esteem.

A student has a *sense of autonomy* when he/she feels capable of managing independently some important points of his/her learning process given a teacher encouraging that.

«Teachers can facilitate or forestall intrinsic motivation by supporting versus thwarting the needs for autonomy and competence » in their students (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 59).

These two needs can be fulfilled when teachers work on their students' natural curiosity guiding them to discover autonomously new things and never suffocating their creativity and individual talent. « Every type of expected tangible reward made contingent on task performance does undermine intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, not only tangible rewards,

but also threats, deadlines, directives and competition pressure diminish intrinsic motivation» (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 59). Therefore a teacher who shows a controlling and strictly regulating teaching method is likely to kill their students natural curiosity and interest in the subject while a teacher who values their learners aptitudes will probably see pupils learn better and quickly, thus enhancing their intrinsic motivation to learn.

«Intrinsically motivated behaviours which are performed out of interest and satisfy the innate psychological needs for competence and autonomy are the prototype of self-determined behaviour» (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 65), where self-determination is intended as the condition people have when starting an activity they have freely chosen and want to engage in.

To sum up, « self - determination theory in the field of education is concerned primarily with promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes » ( Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, Ryan, 1991: 325).

### **1.3 Weiner's *attribution theory***

« Attributions lie at the very heart of motivation to learn » ( Dörnyei, 2001: 118).

In order to understand this statement by Zoltán Dörnyei , one of the fathers of learning motivation research, I move backwards to the psychology theory of the fifties when it was said that the result of a human activity is dependent on personal factors as well as environmental factors. The investigation regarding causality began with this distinction.

In the seventies Bernard Weiner argued that, beyond the internal-external dimension, a second variable influencing human actions exists, which is the stronger or weaker stability of the first factors ( i.e. the personal and environmental elements). « The reasoning was

that, among the internal causes, some fluctuate, whereas others remain relatively constant. For example, ability (or, more appropriately, aptitude) is perceived as a constant capacity; in contrast, other causal factors including effort and mood are perceived as more variable, changing from moment to moment or from period to period » (Weiner, 1985: 551). External aspects were considered in the same way. Weiner assumed that ability, effort, task difficulty and luck were the four main causes affecting the results of actions. «Ability was classified as internal and stable, effort as internal and unstable, task difficulty was thought to be external and stable, and luck was considered external and unstable » (Weiner, 1985: 551) .

Attribution theorists, such as Weiner, therefore «investigate the perception of causality» (Weiner). According to *Attribution theory* , in the field of education, students may consider their school success or failures are dependent on different factors; they can be internal or external, stable or unstable. These factors are mainly ability, effort, task difficulty, luck, mood, family background, help or hindrance from others (Graham).

«Among these, particularly two –*ability* and *effort*- have been identified as the most influential perceived causes in western culture » (Dörnyei, 2001: 118) . Weiner and his colleagues claim that the case when a learner attributes his success or failure to his/her own ability is particularly dangerous while an attribution based on one's effort expenditure is a good attribution. Let's see why.

In the first situation, the student is led to believe learning success is easy to achieve because of his/her own natural talent or, on the contrary, failure is inevitable due to his/her lack of skill, and the same student reaches the conclusion that study is definitely useless as it can't change his/her own capacities, thus he/she doesn't feel motivated to study.

In the second case, a learner believes his/her good marks at school are a consequence of the effort he/she expends during lessons, homework and exams; he thinks the same as

regards bad marks, so this pupil is likely to be motivated to devote his time and energies to learning school subjects.

Given that at school, every learner, whether he/she is brilliant or not, needs to see his/her aptitude recognized and valued, teachers should emphasize the fundamental role of effort expenditure in the learning process, and, should at the same time, diminish the function ability has in a context of a solid and long-lasting learning experience.

«The essence of promoting motivational attributions can be summarised in a short sentence : encourage students' effort attributions ». ( Dörnyei, 2001: 120) »

## **1.4 Schumann's *neurobiological model***

In the nineties Schumann developed a neurobiological model explaining motivation in the Second Language Acquisition. The scholar considered both emotion and cognition as the two fundamental dimensions involved in the motivational process. He explained «the mechanism in the brain that allows emotion to influence cognition » (Schumann, 1997: XIX) assuming that « the success in L2 acquisition is emotionally driven » (Schumann, 1997: XV).

This assumption starts from the fact that our brain hosts a structure called *amygdala* that evaluates external stimuli with regards to their emotional and motivational importance. The appraisal of a stimulus is the main concept in Schumann's theory. I do not intend to go deep into the neuro-physiological structure of the brain, my objective here is to describe the *stimulus appraisal system* and explain why this value system generates and maintains motivation.

Every person has got a values' system «which consists of preferences and aversions, likes and dislikes that are not innate, but are acquired during the lifetime of the individual. This value system or stimulus appraisal system assesses internal and environmental stimuli on the basis of five criteria» ( Schumann, 2004: 8):

- novelty
- pleasantness
- goal significance
- self and social image
- coping ability

In other words, the amygdala produces affective reactions to external stimuli, these emotions are memorized in the brain and thus, future stimuli can be assessed on the basis of the stimulus appraisal system that « emerges at birth and develops on the basis of experience in the world » (Schumann, 2004: 9). Therefore this value system influences the individual «enabling him/her to choose among alternatives according to his/her preferences» ( Schumann, 2004: 24)

Motivation in second language learning is strictly interdependent on the stimulus appraisal system; it involves the evaluation of external stimuli as positive or negative in connection with the objective of language acquisition: if the appraisal is positive the student is likely to be motivated to learn, while in the case of a negative assessment of a stimulus the learner has a less strong motivation in keeping on learning the language. The motivational relevance of the stimuli is evaluated on the basis of the five criteria mentioned above (novelty, pleasantness, relevance to the individual's goals or needs, ability to cope, and compatibility with the individual's self and social image).

This mechanism is based on emotion generation: an external stimulus is appraised on the strength of the « information stored in value category memory based on past experience

and this appraisal produces an emotion ( joy, happiness, fear, anger, shame etc) which leads to action: in the case of language acquisition, undertake or not the learning » (Schumann, 2004: 26).

On the one hand, language learners should be aware that listening to and following their emotions during their acquisition process is the basis of a successful learning experience. On the other hand, teachers have to support their students creating all the conditions to make the above mechanism occur in their students' brain; more specifically teachers' role consists in:

- Creating a good atmosphere in the classroom where each learner feels he is respected and his/her capacities are appreciated;
- Facilitating stable and sincere relationships among students so as to implement cooperative learning;
- Opting for activities that are adequate to his/her students' language level in order to avoid anxiety

These are some examples that should be implemented by teachers with the purpose of generating motivation into learners. In other words, teachers are required to facilitate the production of positive stimuli in the classroom in order to make students feel emotions such as serenity, self-confidence, will to learn, curiosity, satisfaction, etc...All of them are needed so as to generate and maintain motivation to learn.

To sum up, as Zoltán Dörnyei states: « the main attraction of Schumann's neurobiological approach lies in the fact that it offers a completely new type of validity for motivation theories by connecting abstract theoretical constructs to concrete biological mechanism detected in the brain » ( Dörnyei, 2001: 62) .

## 1.5. Dörnyei's 4-step Motivational Teaching Practice

In order to understand better the importance of the words *generate* and *maintain* motivation, I quote here Dörnyei who states that « student motivation will not be automatically there and you will need to try and actively generate positive student attitudes towards learning » ( Dörnyei, 2001: 51).

Given that, Dörnyei assumed that a *4-step Motivational Teaching Practice* (2001) exists in a L2 classroom and it consists of:

1<sup>st</sup> step: *creating the basic motivational conditions*

2<sup>nd</sup> step: *generating initial motivation*

3<sup>rd</sup> step: *maintaining and protecting motivation*

4<sup>th</sup> step: *encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation.*

The first step includes three indispensable motivational conditions. They are (Dörnyei, 2001: 31):

- appropriate teacher behaviors and a good relationship with the students
- a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere
- a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms.

As far as the first point is concerned Dörnyei states that «almost everything a teacher does in the classroom has a motivational influence on students » ( Dörnyei, 2001: 32). Teachers are required to be enthusiastic, committed, positively relating to their students and their learners' parents. In fact a teacher who loves his/her job instills his/her passion in his/her students and motivates them to pursue learning the subject. Moreover, «if you show commitment towards the students' learning and progress, there is a very good chance that they will do the same thing» ( Dörnyei, 2001: 34); whenever students perceive teachers don't care about their learning, their motivation is undermined. But « it is not enough to be

merely committed to the students' academic progress, you also need to have sufficiently high expectations for what the students can achieve » (Dörnyei, 2001: 35) : if you believe they can achieve good results the possibility they reach them is very high, while in the case you have low expectations about their learning progress, they will probably fail (*Pygmalion effect*) .

Furthermore «it is important for a motivating teacher to have a positive relationship with the students on a personal and not just on an academic level »(Dörnyei, 2001: 36), thus a teacher who has established a relationship of mutual respect and trust with their learners, pays attention and responds to their needs and is available when it is necessary, is more likely to make learners appreciate his/her lessons and have a higher motivation.

Finally, the better the relationship teachers have with their learners' parents, the better the relationship with the learners themselves is, thus « parents can be powerful allies in any motivational effort » ( Dörnyei, 2001: 39).

Regarding the second point: having a limited language code and language anxiety can undermine learners' motivation, so there is the need to create a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere. « A further tool to improve the classroom atmosphere is the use of humour that is not so much about continuously cracking jokes but rather having a relaxed attitude about how seriously we take ourselves » ( Dörnyei, 2001: 41).

As for the third point the group of learners should be cohesive that is to say students feel they belong to the same group and they are happy about that; Dörnyei compares this feeling to a kind of 'glue' keeping the learners together, where they collaborate to reach a common objective and help each other. The researcher states that motivation is found to increase in cohesive class groups.

Some factors enhancing group cohesiveness are for example:

- a shared group history;

- proximity (such as sitting next to each other)
- cooperation for a common goal
- successful completion of whole-group tasks and a sense of group achievement
- intragroup competition
- investing in the group
- establishing constructive group norms

These factors are relevant to build the identity of the classroom group and consequently to motivate learners to work together efficaciously.

As mentioned above, Dörnyei proposes a 2<sup>nd</sup> step in his motivational process, that is *generating initial motivation*. Teachers are required to arouse students' curiosity and attention and to create an attractive lesson for them so as to generate a desire to learn.

Language learning needs learners to be positively disposed towards everything the L2 is associated with, such as its culture and its speakers, thus the competences students should improve are intercultural communicative competences that encourage them to open their mind and raise cross-cultural awareness ( integrative value of language learning ). Furthermore teachers should show the usefulness of the language they teach and demonstrate that they can apply what they have learnt in their daily life (instrumental value). Increasing learners' expectancy of success is also important and it can be reached by teachers by providing sufficient preparation, offering assistance to learners, letting students help each other, making the course objectives as clear as possible and removing potential obstacles to learning. It is fundamental for a successful performance that the learners group have a sense of direction and a common goal, thus teachers should work towards increasing the learners' goal-orientedness.

Finally teachers are required to prepare learning materials that are relevant to their learners by finding out what the interests, hobbies and needs of learners are, and use this information to link the lessons they propose to their students' daily life.

If the first two steps have been reached, then students feel they are interested in the subject, they have got clear goals and they can succeed in their learning. However there is « a natural tendency to lose sight of the objective, to get tired or bored of the activity and to give way to attractive distractions » (Dörnyei, 2001: 71) and it will result in the decline of initial motivation.

Therefore motivation should be *maintained and protected* during the course by:

- varying as much as possible all the aspects of the learning process,
- making the tasks more interesting and challenging,
- increasing student involvement,
- explaining the purpose and meaningfulness of the task,
- providing appropriate strategies to do the task,
- setting specific learning goals,
- protecting the students' self-esteem and self-confidence,
- reducing language anxiety,
- promoting cooperative learning among learners,
- creating learner autonomy.

They are some examples that Dörnyei has proven to be inarguably important for a stable learning motivation.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and last step in the motivation model elaborated by the researcher is *encouraging positive self-evaluation*. In fact a very important aspect in motivating learners is « to help

them to deal with their past in a way that it will promote rather than hinder future effort » (Dörnyei, 2001: 117). This phase is strictly connected to the *Attribution Theory* I dealt with above: teachers are required to sustain their learners in attributing the right cause to their past learning successes or failures. Moreover their role is providing students with relevant feedback about their efforts and achievements, which helps them to continue to make progress towards their personal and class learning goals. «Motivational feedback makes the learner reflect on areas that need improvement and identify things that he/she can do to increase effectiveness in learning» (Dörnyei, 2001: 123).

There are some other strategies that can help teachers in encouraging positive self-evaluation of their learners. They are for example over-celebrating students when they succeed in accomplishing a task and giving rewards, thus students feel more sure about themselves, motivation can be boosted and their learning becomes more efficacious.

## **1.6 Final words**

This chapter shows some of the main theories related to motivation to learn a second or foreign language considering the role of teachers; they are all valid and each of them « provides a framework by which to understand students motivation to learn» (Wery and Thomson, 2013: 1).

The following chapter consists of a literature review: I will consider some case studies researchers have conducted about the role teachers have in their learners motivation; in the wide spectrum of proposal I have chosen eight researches that I believe to be meaningful for my work.

Therefore the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> chapters present a background to the last two chapters ( the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ) that are dedicated to my case study focused on the role mother tongue language assistants have in motivating their university students.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **Literature review: Motivating students by teachers**

In this chapter I will present some case studies scholars have investigated about the role of teachers in their learners' motivation. This overview is not intended to be exhaustive; given that it is almost impossible to consider all the articles researchers have published on this topic, I will rather take into account a little part of the literature I found particularly meaningful to my study.

This section includes case studies concerning a wide range of diverse learning experiences in different learning contexts such as primary, middle and high schools, CLIL classes and a distance learning class; the subjects taught are English or other languages like French and Japanese, and finally some non-linguistic disciplines. Moreover, these researches cover a long lapse of time, three decades: 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, thus a more complete framework is guaranteed.

My objective is to prove that even if the research about the role of teachers in their learners' motivation is so vast, it does not touch the role language assistants have as regards to the motivational strategies they implement at university and I mean to fill this gap.

## 2.1. Relating motivational teaching practice to learners motivation

As stated above, the case studies I consider investigate the link between learners' motivation and teachers' practice, taking into account different learning contexts and countries.

**Skinner and Belmont** (1993) examined the effects that teachers' behavior had on their pupils' engagement. This study is based on the fact, proven by previous researches, that the source of students' motivation is inside learners themselves and the external context has to fill learners' needs; therefore the more teachers manage to respond to their pupils needs the more efficacious learning is and so learners' motivation can be boosted.

The investigation involved 144 children aged 7-11 years old living and attending school in New York's suburbs, and 14 teachers. By means of a questionnaire administered twice within a school year, both to learners and teachers, Skinner and Belmont researched the consequences of teaching practices on learners' motivation but they also focused on the effects that pupils' engagement had on their teachers' behavior in class.

A clarification is needed: by the word *behavior* the two researchers meant three dimensions, that is to say, teachers should involve their pupils, structure lessons well and support their autonomy; each of them responds to children's psychological requirements (the need to be related to other people, the need to be competent and the need to be autonomous as Deci and Ryan point out) and combined together identify a teacher's behavior in the classroom: for example teachers might clearly structure their lesson, but at the same time give a strong support to learners' autonomy and thus better involve their students.

Moreover, by the word pupils' *engagement* Skinner and Belmont refer to both behavior and emotions, thus an engaged pupil shows attention, effort and strength of will (concerning

his/her *behavior*) and at the same time he/she is also enthusiastic, optimistic, curious and interested during lessons (being his/her *emotions* ), while a disengaged pupil is passive and he/she often abandons the activity he/she is doing when it turns out to be more difficult, he/she is also anxious and bored in class.

The two researchers demonstrated that there is a strong reciprocal correlation between teachers' behavior and pupils' engagement in the classroom: on the one hand the way teachers behave in class affects the effort and attention students take in their learning (a teacher fixing clear objectives and implementing adequate motivational strategies make learners participate, be determined and emotionally involved during lessons), on the other hand students' efforts influence teachers' practice (if the learners engage themselves at school, teachers care about them and boost their active participation, while teachers respond to passive and inattentive pupils in a way that increases their disengagement).

Therefore Skinner and Belmont conclude that there is a strong need to change some class dynamics: «changing teachers behaviors from those that undermine to those that promote the engagement of discouraged children should be a top priority of educational reform » ( Skinner and Belmont, 1993: 580).

Also **Guilloteaux and Dörnyei** (2008) conducted a vast research (1,300 participants) on motivation among children, but in this case they were aged 12-15; the country they chose was South Korea.

Their objective was the same as above: to investigate the link between the teaching motivational practice and language learners' motivation, considering students' level of attention, participation and volunteering. By means of an observation scheme (adapted to the MOLT observation scheme ), a questionnaire and a post-lesson evaluation scale of teachers' performance, the researchers made a detailed picture of both the learners and

teachers' point of view. Specifically the classroom observation scheme included 25 motivational strategies for foreign language classrooms elaborated by Dörnyei in 2001, thus the amount of strategies teachers implemented in class represented their skill in motivating their learners.

Guilloteaux and Dörnyei observed that the behavior learners had was a signal of their motivation: motivated students were attentive and engaged and they answered appropriately to teachers, while others were chatting or sleeping or studying another subject, thus they were demotivated. Moreover the researchers found that teachers motivational practices positively affect their students motivation and it is also associated to a general liking of the whole course.

Therefore Guilloteaux and Dörnyei concluded that language teachers adopting relevant motivational strategies in the classroom represent a valuable factor in their students motivated behavior. Finally they state: « given that student demotivation is a major problem in educational settings worldwide, finding ways to raise teachers' awareness of their motivating practices and to train them in using skills that can help them to motivate learners should be a prominent methodological concern » (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008: 73).

**Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini and Ratcheva** ( 2013) reinforced the survey by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei because they empirically tested the use of motivational strategies by teachers in a Saudi EFL learning context going deeper in the investigation, and they found that the implementation of motivational strategies positively influences learners motivation.

They researched in the Saudi Arabian context asking about 300 learners aged 12-25 and 14 teachers to answer a motivation questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of a fixed period. Students were divided into an experimental group where motivational strategies

were adopted and a control group traditionally taught ( age, EFL acquisition experiences, school grade and living region being equal).

A guide was created by the researchers so as to help teachers teaching in the experimental group in implementing the previously chosen (in a pilot study) motivational strategies. «It comprised a range of specific techniques to translate the preselected motivational strategies in the classroom context » (Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini and Ratcheva, 2013: 42). Teachers in the experimental group ticked the strategies they used, in the checklist provided.

A final observation of the class dynamics was performed by the four researchers with the aim to verify whether the teachers really used the above mentioned motivational strategies or not.

Therefore Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini and Ratcheva empirically tested teachers' behavior and proved that the proper strategies they implemented were responsible for increasing learners' motivation. They found that intrinsic motivation had increased in the experimental group, linguistic anxiety had decreased and integrative motivation had increased in the same group. These changes were due to the motivational strategies treatment implemented and created a difference in the level of motivation between the two groups.

**Hapsari's** case study (2013) is based on the same principle as Moskovosky, Alrabai, Paolini and Ratcheva's, that is to say «motivation is the key to the success of second and foreign language learning » and «for this reason, teachers play a crucial role in building and enhancing students' motivation to learn English» ( Hapsari, 2013: 114).

This researcher involved Indonesian EFL learners aged 12-18 years old and 28 teachers in her investigation, and collected data through questionnaires and interviews; the investigation included two types of questionnaires, the Teaching Quality Questionnaire

(TQQ) and the Teacher's Characteristic and Preference Questionnaire (TCPQ): TQQ evaluated the quality of the teachers' work based on students perceptions (teachers could be enthusiastic, resourceful, creative and strict) and TCPQ « served as a tool to see teacher's perceived characteristics regarding motivating behaviors and practices, as well as their preferences for using particular motivational strategies» (Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2013: 120).

In fact Hapsari aimed at researching the perception teachers had about the effort they took so as to motivate their students to learn; moreover it looked at the strategies teachers themselves like best and thus implement in their classrooms. Although motivational strategies are the focus of the research by Moskovosky, Alrabai, Paolini and Ratcheva's and Hapsari's, they are dealt with in a different way: in the former the researchers focused on the effects of the implementation of these strategies by teachers on their learners' motivation, while the latter stopped at the teacher level investigating his/her preferences about the strategies to use.

Specifically Hapsari found that both learners and teachers agree on the fact that motivation is fundamental to create an efficacious learning process and that teachers are in charge of boosting their learners' motivation; the researcher even put the teacher in the first place in the rank of factors affecting learning motivation, then there were teaching materials, tasks, texts and tests. Her research also confirmed that learners motivation is augmented by the interaction between students and teachers who should propose pleasant activities in classroom. Furthermore Hapsari concluded that there should be an equilibrium between easy and challenging learning experiences so as to guarantee an efficacious acquisition process to learners: this mix causes a stronger self-confidence and self-esteem to develop in learners, and consequently their motivation increases.

An investigation regarding the perceptions teachers and students have about studying a foreign language was conducted by **Caon** (2012). Specifically he researched the perception Italian middle school learners had about studying French and compared it with the point of view of their teachers.

Caon found that nowadays while English is perceived as the most useful language, French is seen having a subordinate role, and we can suppose that learners are less motivated to study it; therefore the researcher stated that investigating the perception learners have regarding their studying French is important in order to elaborate teaching methodologies aimed at improving their motivation.

Students were administered a questionnaire about their motivation to study French while teachers were asked to tell their experience of teaching this language during an interview; schools that sent the questionnaires back to the authors were located in 6 Italian regions: Veneto, Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Marches, Tuscany and Latium and the number of questionnaires that was acceptable was 825.

All the questions were designed on the basis of a challenging value in learning, which is pleasure, being according to Balboni, « indispensable to create stable and long-lasting acquisition processes » (Balboni, 1994: 75). Caon highlighted an important result as regards pleasure: 95% of the learners asked for teachers to present pleasant activities, thus they create intrinsic motivation in their students causing them to learn better. Moreover teachers agreed on the fact that students did not have an instrumental motivation when studying French, but they needed funny, practical and creative activities, proposed following their learning pace and at the same time challenging, thus to make them love studying French. More precisely Caon found that teachers should create complex language acquisition opportunities that is to say activities where learners can use their previous knowledge and their resources to solve new problems, they can interact in tasks shaped on

real life and use diverse channels to express themselves; playful teaching methodology, cooperative learning and peer tutoring could help.

Finally, teaching combining ministerial requirements and learners' needs emerged to be a priority for a French teacher; at the same level of importance there is a good relationship between teacher and learner: each student should feel respected and valued, which represents a positive way towards motivating learners.

When conducting her case study, asking 200 Kuwaiti learners aged 18-21 to answer a questionnaire, also **Al Rifai** (2010) went deep into how teaching affects students' motivation towards learning and suggests that some changes in teaching should be implemented thus to achieve the final goal to motivate students.

So she investigated learners' attitudes, the instrumental and integrative motivation involved in EFL learning and why learning English is sometimes difficult for the participants in the survey.

The resulting data were obtained considering some independent variables (age, grades in English, mother's education, father's education, mother's level of English, father's level of English, TV programmes watched, communicating in English in the house, and communicating in English with friends) and some dependent variables (learners' attitude towards English, integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, teachers' attitude and teaching behavior in class, class courses, learning strategies, difficulties and negative feelings faced while learning the language) the questionnaire was elaborated upon.

Filling in the above mentioned form, the 107 Kuwaiti students participating in the investigation gave the researcher a picture as complete as possible of the attitudes, motivation and difficulties involved in learning the English language and an overview of the factors that affect motivation in learning it.

In particular , Al Rifai concluded that younger learners have a higher motivation and a better attitude towards learning the English language compared to the older ones; moreover the former feel more difficulties when learning in comparison to the latter. In addition, learners above average at English have a stronger motivation and a positive attitude and less negative feelings compared to students up to average at English. Finally learners watching TV programmes in English and those communicating in English at home are more motivated and show a much better attitude towards learning English.

Therefore motivation and attitudes towards EFL learning is proven to vary depending on different variables I mentioned above, but the importance these factors have for a successful learning experience is demonstrated as well as the relevance this case study has for improvement in teaching methodology.

Also **Kubota** (1999), who investigated the role of motivation among learners in a via satellite Japanese learning program in a United States high school, showed that students succeed in their acquisition only if motivated, focusing especially on involvement and passion in learning this language as the key factors.

The researcher used three instruments for his research: a language test, a questionnaire (elaborated on the basis of the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery -AMTB- created by Gardner in 1985) and a class observation; he proposed the test and administered the questionnaire three times during the school year. As for the class observation, Kubota visited the class once every one or two weeks directly observing it during telephone conversations via satellite Japanese learners experimented with teachers and during TV broadcasts; 85 minutes of conversation and 99 minutes of broadcasting were recorded. The observation scheme was adapted to the case study on the basis of the COLT scheme so as

to evaluate the communicative aspects of Japanese via satellite lessons in this American high school.

Kubota found that via satellite learning programmes provide benefits ( such as a low level of anxiety and the chance to develop autonomy when acquiring, and also useful learning instruments like images and videos that facilitate the acquisition process), but they have also some disadvantages: for example they often lack face-to-face interaction, active participation of learners and communication among peers. The scholar underlined that motivation is the key factor improving learning and guaranteeing positive outcomes when proposing a distance-learning course, thus Kubota's research aimed at setting some recommendations for teachers and school administrators resulting in a more motivating and efficacious via satellite teaching.

In fact this study showed that if a teaching proposal is interesting and varied, it follows the learners' acquisition rhythm and it responds to their needs, it is supported by good teaching materials and proper technical instruments, and finally mother tongue language assistants help, thus learners' motivation increases, their attitudes toward learning are more positive and consequently language acquisition improves. This proved that distance learning can be as valuable as traditional teaching if the above mentioned main factors occur.

The last case study I considered is by **Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra** (2014). They investigated what learners aged 12-15 years old liked and disliked as regards to their CLIL course; moreover they focused on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this teaching practice and they concluded proposing a set of recommendations which may help CLIL teachers to boost their students' motivation.

Specifically the researchers asked 221 CLIL students enrolled in the compulsory secondary education in the Basque Autonomous Community to fill out a questionnaire which included three open-ended questions concerning their liking as regards to their CLIL experience.

Previous researches proved that motivation in language acquisition is negatively affected by boring and repetitive courses and learners' demotivation is so frustrating to teachers. Therefore this study aimed at investigating the role of motivation in CLIL teaching, focusing on learners' pleasure when acquiring, a key element as announced above.

Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra found that learners believe CLIL has more advantages ( being beneficial for learning English, the foreign language used, for the learners' future studies and career, and finally improving communicative skills with foreign people) than disadvantages (students agree on the fact that CLIL classes are sometimes difficult to follow because the non-linguistic discipline is taught in English); moreover what learners like exceeds what they dislike ( CLIL helps in improving the mastery of English, cooperative learning is promoted and lessons are varied).

The researchers concluded that CLIL classes are generally motivating for learners who are not afraid of the effort and commitment needed, even if some of them require lessons to be more interesting and pleasant. There were also divergent opinions such as for example: on the one hand CLIL classes are seen as useful to improve the knowledge of the foreign language while at the same time limiting the possibility to learn the non-linguistic discipline; on the other hand a CLIL experience guarantees a more motivating learning experience given that English is the medium of instruction.

## 2.2. Final words

As mentioned in the foreword, the case studies I have chosen take into consideration a wide range of diverse teaching situations (from primary to high school, from CLIL classes to distance learning) and subjects taught ( languages such as English, French and Japanese and non-linguistic disciplines), involved learners of different ages ( from 7 to 25 years old) and were located almost all over the world; as far as the setting was concerned the above mentioned researches were conducted in the United States of America ( Skinner and Belmont's and Kubota's ), in the Middle East ( Al Rifai's and Moskovisky, Alrabai, Paolini and Ratcheva's ), in Asia ( Hapsari's and Guilloteaux and Dörnyei's ) and in Europe ( Caon's and Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra's ). This variety provided a framework of the whole educational field going from primary school to university, around the world.

My work aims at investigating motivation in language learning, especially regarding the role teachers play in boosting their students motivation; the above literature review offers proven evidence that research concerning the relevance language assistants have in their learners motivated behavior is far from being complete, thus I conducted a case study at an University in the North of Italy involving university native speaker language assistants. The following chapter will deal with it.

## Part 2.

## Chapter 3.

### My case study

#### 3.1. My goal and research questions

Nowadays students frequently feel demotivated because of diverse factors including for example a personal disinterest in the subject they study, a desire to stop going to school and begin working due to students' or families' will, and sometimes also a teaching style that does not capture learners' attention and commitment. This can happen both at school and at university. Therefore I opted for going deep into the field of motivation that I consider a fundamental factor for an effective learning experience; in fact Dörnyei states that « long-term sustained learning cannot take place unless the educational context provides, in addition to cognitively adequate instructional practices, sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in the learners » (Dörnyei, 2007: 719).

Considering that the teaching literature I reviewed in chapter 2 presents a gap in the field of motivation and particularly concerning the role mother tongue language assistants have in motivating their university students, I decided to conduct a case study in this context.

I asked language assistants working in an Italian university in the North of Italy some questions about the above mentioned topic and I administered a questionnaire to students, thus I collected data regarding both the points of view, the assistants' one and the learners' one. Moreover I proposed a questionnaire to the students of French who attended a *tutorato* I did at the same university from the beginning of April to the end of May, 2017.

Thus I had also this perspective, which helped me in adding some data to the previous ones, concerning particularly the role a tutor has in his/her learners' motivation.

My final goal was to investigate the relevance motivation has in the learning process of university students and the important role mother tongue language assistants play in enhancing their desire and will to learn; I focused especially on the motivational strategies language assistants implement. Furthermore I compared these results with the ones I obtained from the questionnaire I administered to my students during *tutorato*, thus I could get as complete a picture as possible of the preferences students show about their assistants' and tutors' work. Chapter 4 presents the results of this investigation and discusses their implications in the educational field.

In order to achieve my objective I elaborated the following research questions:

1. What motivational strategies do language assistants adopt to generate, maintain and protect motivation in their university students? Which strategies are neglected or rarely used?
2. Given the Ten Commandments for motivating language learners resulting from an empirical study by Zoltàn Dörnyei conducted in the school context, are there any differences in the strategies university language assistants implement compared to the commandments Dörnyei formulated? Are there any similarities? Why can this be interesting ?
3. Are university mother tongue language assistants sensitive to their students motivational needs ?

4. What are the differences and similarities concerning the perception learners have about the motivational teaching practice a university mother tongue language assistant implement compared to the ones a university language tutor adopts?

In chapter 4 the results of the survey will be presented and analysed, the above mentioned research questions will be responded to and a final discussion performed.

### **3.2. Participants**

Given the previously explained goal of my case study I opted for involving both mother tongue language assistants working in the surveyed university and learners studying in the same institution, in the investigation.

The first people I asked to participate were the language assistants, I managed to involve 17 of them: 10 women and 7 men teaching ten languages, which are: English ( 2 assistants), French ( 3 assistants), Spanish ( 2 assistants), Portuguese ( 1 assistant), German ( 1 assistant), Anglo-American ( 1 assistant), Arabic ( 2 assistants), Japanese ( 1 assistant), Korean ( 1 assistant) and Italian to foreigners ( 3 assistants ). They appeared to be very interested in participating in this case study.

Then I decided to try to capture the university students' attention, thus I posted some questions on Facebook about motivation: I asked them their opinion about what they liked

and did not like regarding the *letturato* they attended (the questionnaire is showed in the Appendix); I succeeded in making 155 of them participate in the investigation, so I feel satisfied; 72 % of these learners are enrolled on a Bachelor degree and the remaining 28 % on a Master degree. Among them 22.5% studies English, 18.3 % Spanish, 12.9 % Russian, 9.06 % German, 6.5 % French, 4.5% Portuguese, 8.4 % Japanese, 5.6 % Chinese and other small percentages of people study other languages (2.5% Arabic, 1.9% Sweden, 1.9 % Hindi, 1.8 % Korean, 0.6% Serbian-Croatian, 0.6 % Italian Sign Language, 0.6% modern Greek, 0.6% Polish, 0.6% Persian, 0.6% Turkish).

Finally I administered a questionnaire to learners aged 19 or 20 years old attending my *tutorato* of French language and civilization. I administered it three times during the *tutorato* period and I got a maximum of 9 filled forms back each time (see section 3.3. *Instruments* for details ).

### **3.3. Instruments**

The research instruments I used are interview and questionnaire. In this section I will explain on which occasions I proposed each of them and who responded to my request.

All the mother tongue university language assistants surveyed received an e-mail where I asked them three questions (see Appendix) about their teaching practice as regards to motivational strategies they usually implement. I tried to get as many assistants to answer me as possible, so I accepted the way they preferred to respond to my questions: via e-mails or by means of an interview. I got 17 language assistants to answer my questions: the

majority opted for me interviewing them (12 people) and the 5 remaining answered via e-mail. Some of the assistants who wrote me via e-mail only answered my questions partially: I got 15 out of 17 fully responded questions, 2 assistants did not answer questions 2 and 3. I can suppose that their reason is a lack of time.

Moreover I administered a questionnaire ( Questionnaire N.1) to university students attending *letturato* in the surveyed university, and I named it *La motivazione ad apprendere*: I prepared the form by means of *Google Form* and I posted it on Facebook in the University groups, thus learners having an account on Facebook and belonging to these groups of students could fill it out. I received 155 fully completed questionnaires back. The massive response students produced is an index of their need to express their opinion as regards the *letturato* they attend, aimed at valuing its strong points and changing its weaknesses.

Finally I proposed a questionnaire I named *Tutorato e Motivazione* (Questionnaire N. 2) to the students attending my French tutoring meetings at University from the 5<sup>th</sup> of April to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 2017. I administered it to them three times in this two-month period: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. I got a maximum of 9 filled forms back each time from the learners ( 7 the first time, 9 the second time and 5 the third), the varying number depending on the number of people who attended the meeting the days I administered the questionnaire.

To sum up:

- 17 university language assistants were interviewed ( or answered me via e-mails),
- 155 university students attending *letturato* responded to my Questionnaire N.1,

- a maximum of 9 first- year university students attending my French tutorato answered my Questionnaire N.2

The three instruments I used for my investigation are attached at the end of my work, in the Appendix.

### 3.4. Times

The investigation began 15<sup>th</sup> October 2016 and ended 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017.

I interviewed the language assistants and received their e-mails between 30<sup>th</sup> October and 19<sup>th</sup> December.

In the meanwhile I decided to administer Questionnaire N. 1 (*La motivazione ad apprendere*) to students attending *letturato* and I posted it on Facebook on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2016: in a week I got 25 people to answer it. I tried to post it again in May 2017 when I got 155 fully completed questionnaires back.

When I began the project of tutorato in April 2017 I understood that I could ask the point of view of my students of French regarding their motivation and liking of the laboratory and then compare the results obtained with those I have had from the previous questionnaire, thus I elaborated Questionnaire N. 2 (*Tutorato e motivazione*) and I administered it to my students three times: on 12<sup>th</sup> April, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and finally on 24<sup>th</sup> May. This choice is due to the fact that once I got the completed questionnaire back, I could consider the answers of my students and adjust my *tutorato* for the following lessons and then test my performance again with another administration of the appreciation questionnaire until the end of the laboratory. This let me understand which changes and improvements were possible in order to meet my students' needs.

### 3.5. Data analysis

Data from the 17 interviews ( and e-mails ) and from the 155 Questionnaires N. 1 and 24 Questionnaires N. 2 ( I added up 7 questionnaires of the first time, 9 of the second time and 8 the third) were tabulated. Here I will explain how I performed it taking into consideration each instrument of research.

As far as the interviews to mother tongue university language assistants are concerned, I transcribed the recordings on paper (and I printed the e-mail some assistants sent me as their answers) and then I read the whole material I had.

Afterwards I considered one of the four questions at a time and while I read again each assistant' s answer I noted down the fundamental points for each of them. Next I drew a table for each question where I could put the main information and compare them for the final discussion.

Regarding the questionnaire I administered to students who attended the *letturato*, I consulted the graphs created automatically by *Google Forms* on the basis of the answers given by the students; moreover I read the 155 answers they gave to the last question I asked ( “ why do you feel motivated or not to continue attending these courses ?”). In fact in 7 out of 8 questions the application provided a graph of the answers given to each question ( pie chart or bar graph ), while the answers to the last question of the questionnaire consisted of sentences, each of them being the answer of one student out of 155. Then I collected the answers to this last question and I wrote a list of macro-strategies, each of them including the strategies that could be assimilated. Data found by means of the graphs and the list have been then tabulated; so the final discussion could be performed.

I analysed the data I got from the questionnaire I had proposed to my students of *tutorato* and I elaborated an overview of the main findings.

I will not only consider the data coming from the interviews and the ones provided by the questionnaires separately, but I will integrate them together because they represent a way to compare the point of view of mother tongue language assistants and the one belonging to their students, thus I will also propose a comparison in my discussion, which will give the opportunity to effectively evaluate the role assistants have in their students' motivation. Moreover the opinion of my students attending *tutorato* will be included in the final discussion.

The following chapter includes all the results and the discussion about them; a final conclusion will be performed so as to highlight the role mother tongue language assistants have in their university students' motivation.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Results and discussion**

#### **4.1. Results**

In this chapter I will present the results of my survey taking into consideration one instrument of investigation at a time:

1. the interviews to the mother tongue language assistants,
2. the questionnaire I administered to university students attending assistantship,
3. the questionnaire I asked my students of French tutorship to fill out.

A discussion about the implications of these results for the educational field will then be presented, by firstly answering the four research questions and secondly highlighting the main data and commenting on them in the light of the theoretical framework and the case studies conducted by researchers I dealt with in Part 1 of this work.

##### **4.1.1. Interviews**

Here I will show what resulted from the interviews I did with the university mother tongue language assistants and the e-mails some of them sent me.

The three questions the assistants were asked are:

*Question 1* : how do you usually motivate your students to learn? Could you please point out ten strategies you adopt and put them in order according to your teaching experience, from the most useful to the least?

*Question 2* : I list here Ten Commandments for motivating language learners resulting from an empirical study by Zoltàn Dörnyei , a very important scholar researching in this field.

Here they are:

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
3. Present the task properly
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence
6. Make the language classes interesting
7. Promote learner autonomy
8. Personalize the learning process
9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture

What I ask you is to put them in order from the one you find more useful to the least . It's ok if you list the numbers 1-10 corresponding to the commandments above.

*Question 3* : are there, among these commandments above, some you find not important? Could you please explain why ?

I will consider one question at a time and I will report the results obtained.

#### **4.1.1.1. Interviews: Question 1**

As far as question 1 is concerned, here I will present the main strategies assistants pointed out concerning the way they motivate their university learners. I will group them in some main macro-strategies and I will mark the number of assistants implementing each macro-strategy and the specific strategies included in each group.

University mother tongue language assistants stated that they motivate their learners by:

- **making learners participate actively in the lesson (13 out of 17)**
  - allowing learners to express themselves (5/17)
  - encouraging cooperative learning ( 4/17)
  - getting learners to socialize with each other ( 1/17)
  - offering them interactive and involving lessons (3/17)
  
- **proposing interesting lessons ( 12 out of 17 )**
  - creating challenging lessons (3/17)
  - using authentic materials and proposing topical subjects ( 4 /17)
  - making lessons relevant for students (2/17)
  - proposing materials that are close to the real life students live and offering them some occasions to practice daily life communication and dialogues included in authentic situations (3/17)
  
- **promoting intercultural and inter-linguistic competences (9 out of 17)**
  - linking language and culture during lessons (4/17)
  - stimulating learners to experience direct contacts with native speakers ( 3/17)

- highlighting the similarities between the language taught and the learners' mother tongue ( usually Italian ) and the differences between them –contrastive grammar- ( 2/17)
  
- **creating pleasure in learning (8 out of 17)**
  - trying to propose lessons as pleasant and enjoyable as possible (1/17)
  - implementing playful teaching (3/17)
  - making students aware that the Italian-for-foreigners language course they were attending was an opportunity they have to learn the language and not a compulsory subject, thus they can enjoy learning (1/17)
  - stimulating them to feel passion for studying the language taught and showing, as teachers, our own enthusiasm ( 2/17)
  - getting students to bring cakes ( 1/17)
  
- **varying the teaching proposal (7 out of 17)**
  - being sensitive and changing the way they teach and the materials they use (4/17)
  - offering the chance to improve all the four skills ( written production and comprehension, oral production and comprehension ) ( 3/17)
  
- **observing individual differences and taking care of each learner (whenever possible) (7 out of 17)**
  - considering the cognitive style learners have ( 1/17)
  - identifying strengths and weaknesses of learners, valuing their strong points and strengthening their weak points ( 1/17)
  - personalizing teaching (with small groups) ( 2/17)

- helping students who need a support and letting others exercise autonomously (1/17)
- linking contents taught to personal memories students may have ( 1/17)
- asking them for constant feedbacks ( 1 /17)
- **facilitating learning (7 out of 17)**
  - given that the biggest motivation comes from within the learner, helping learners to find their intrinsic motivation ( 2/17);
  - explaining that learning at university is different from learning at school and supporting the transition from school to university (1/17)
  - repeating difficult rules, concepts and topics ( 1/17)
  - associating the explanation of any linguistic phenomenon to an image ( 2/17)
  - getting learners to use devices ( 1/17)
- **increasing their autonomy (6 out of 17)**
  - treating learners like young adults and boosting their autonomy ( 1/17)
  - explaining that learning a language needs effort and commitment ( 1/17)
  - encouraging them by saying that they will progressively improve ( 1/17)
  - improving their self-confidence ( 1/17)
  - insisting on a certain level of behavior and fixing class norms ( 1/17)
  - stressing the fact that language study is rewarding and empowering ( 1/17)
- **creating a serene atmosphere in the classroom ( 6 out of 17)**
  - getting learners to work without fear of making mistakes (4/17)
  - adopting humor ( 2/17)

- **marking the goal the course has (6 out of 17):**

- explaining to learners the usefulness of the course for their personal and professional life (1/17);
- finding activities that are functional to achieve the final objective of the course (1/17);
- underlying which useful competences they can get from studying that subject (1/17);
- presenting the link between the contents of the lessons and the requirements of the exam (1/17);
- directly telling learners that if they want to learn the language they need to study (1/17);
- define clear goals and plan each lesson ( 1/17)

The university language assistants I interviewed and whose motivating teaching experience I dealt with above agree on the fact that the choice of the strategies they can use in the classroom depends on the size and type of group of students they have, but also on time constraints and lack of conducive settings. In particular, two assistants explained to me that the way they motivate students depends on the group of students they have : if it is a small one they manage to get them all to speak and practise individually, while with a larger group this is not possible and they divide the class into work groups that cooperate to reach the learning goal.

Moreover three assistants stated that students learning a foreign or second language do not need to be motivated, they are already motivated to attend the courses and study the language, due to the fact that they chose to enroll and they are more autonomous compared to the school context. On the contrary, another language assistant explained to me that he finds university learners less motivated than we normally think and the

assistants need to make an effort to inspire them to like and improve in learning the language they have personally chosen to study, given that often students opt to attend for example Spanish lessons only because this language seems easy to learn and pleasant to listen to, thus they lack a strong intrinsic motivation.

#### 4.1.1.2. Interviews : *Question 2*

The next section presents the results to question 2, where I have asked the assistants to provide their point of view concerning the list of *Ten Commandments* Dornyei pointed out in 1998. Following are the commandments:

Commandments/ Strategies	
1	Set a personal example with your own behavior
2	Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
3	Present the task properly
4	Develop a good relationship with the learners
5	Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence
6	Make the language classes interesting
7	Promote learner autonomy
8	Personalize the learning process
9	Increase the learners' goal-orientedness
10	Familiarize learners with the target language culture

Table 1. The Ten Commandments by Dornyei (1998)

As requested, the assistants ordered these strategies from the one they use most to the least used. I will point out these strategies by means of a number from 1 to 10 in Table 2 and Graph 1.

Table 2 contains all the data obtained. The number in each cell corresponds to the number of assistants who put each of the strategies in a specific position from I to X ( I corresponds to “the most used” position and X to “the least used” position).

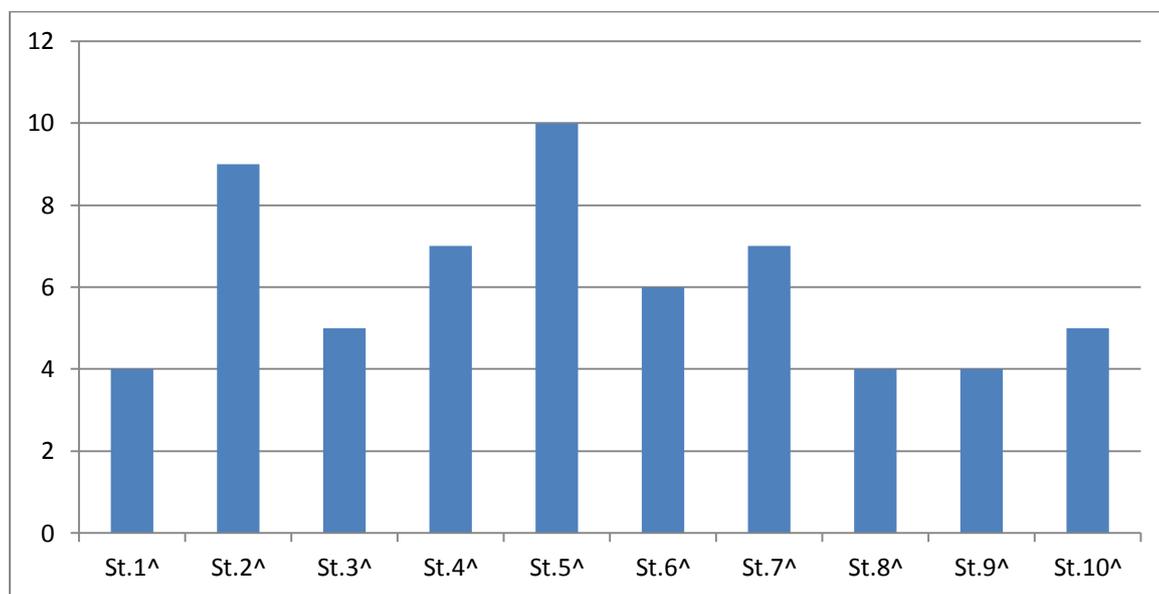
Here is the table:

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
<b>St.1^</b>	1	1	1	1		1		1	2	2
<b>St.2^</b>	5		1	3	2	1			2	
<b>St.3^</b>	3	1		1	3	1	3	1		1
<b>St.4^</b>	2	1	2	2	1	2	1		2	
<b>St.5^</b>	1	4	5			1	1			
<b>St.6^</b>	1	1	4			3	1	2		1
<b>St.7^</b>	2	4	1		2	1	1	1		
<b>St.8^</b>	2			2		2	4	1	1	
<b>St.9^</b>	2		1	1	4	1		2	1	1
<b>St.10^</b>		1		4	2		2		1	3

Table 2. The frequency with which assistants use the Ten Commandments (Dörnyei)

By observing the table it is evident that none of the numbers in any of the strategies' line adds up to 17, that is the number of assistants who answered. This is due to the fact that two assistants did not answer question number 2, another two assistants stated that all the 10 commandments are equally used and the rest presented a partial list that I considered in the table as well.

As I pointed out above, I used this tabulation to create a graph, which follows:



Graph 1. The most frequent use of the commandments (positions I to IV)

In the graph, the axe of the abscissas presents the ten strategies and the axe of the ordinates the number of assistants using those strategies most.

I will report the data included in the first four columns of Table 2, positions from I to IV, which can be referred to as the most used strategies.

The most used strategies, according to the language assistants I interviewed, are

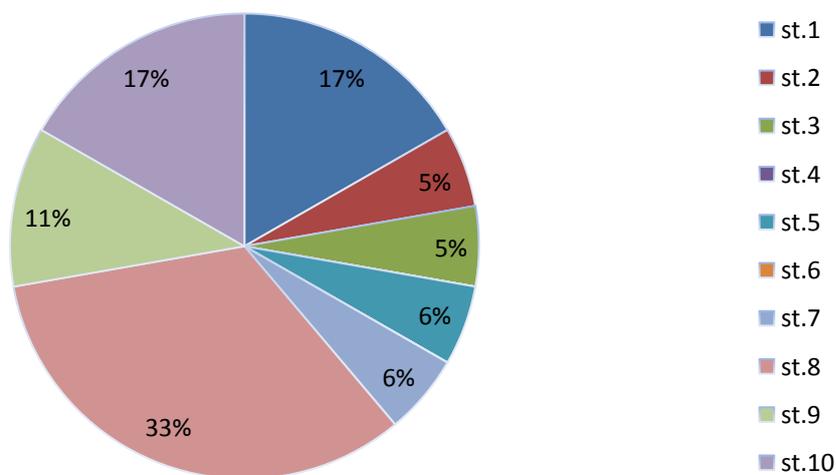
- Strategy 5 (10 assistants),
- Strategy 2 (9 assistants),

- Strategy 4 and Strategy 7 (7 assistants),
- Strategy 6 (6 assistants),
- Strategy 3 and Strategy 10 (5 assistants),
- Strategies 1, Strategy 8 and Strategy 9 (4 assistants).

#### 4.1.1.3 Interviews : Question 3

Finally I asked assistants the last question, *Question 3*, which is: are there, among these commandments above, some you do not find important? Could you please explain why ?

I represent here the data obtained by means of a pie graph, which follows:



Graph 2. The least important Commandments according to the assistants

The strategy that is considered the least important to motivate university students to learn, by language assistants, is evidently Strategy 8<sup>^</sup> (*Personalize the learning process*) with a percentage of assistants equal to 33 %. Strategies 1<sup>^</sup> (*Set a personal example with your own behavior*) and Strategy 10<sup>^</sup> (*Familiarize learners with the target language culture*) reach a percentage of 17 % assistants marking them as little important. 11% of the

interviewed assistants believes that Strategy 9<sup>^</sup>, which is *Increase the learners' goal-orientedness*, is less important than the others. Strategies 5<sup>^</sup> (*Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence*) and 7<sup>^</sup> (*Promote learner autonomy*) are marked by 6 % of the assistants as little useful, and finally Strategies 2<sup>^</sup> and 3<sup>^</sup> correspond to 5% of assistants choosing them as little important in motivating learning.

Some assistants also explained the reasons they chose one or more specific strategy as the least important. I will report the most relevant ones.

The language assistants who consider the least important strategy to be Strategy 8<sup>^</sup> motivate this opinion by saying that its implementation is not always possible: personalizing the teaching is a successful experience only when the group of students is a little one and teachers can listen to the needs of everybody.

As far as Strategy 10<sup>^</sup> (*familiarize learners with the target language culture*) is concerned, one assistant stated that the language he teaches, English, is nowadays a universal language, thus the above-mentioned strategy is not so relevant in this case.

As shown above, '*Set a personal example with your own behavior*', which is Strategy 1<sup>^</sup>, was not considered as very important by university assistants, in fact for example one of the language assistants I interviewed told me that lessons should be learner-centred, thus teachers should not give their own point of view but rather value their learners' beliefs and pay attention to their needs.

#### **4.1.2. Questionnaire N. 1**

In the following section I will present the results I have obtained from the questionnaires I administered to university students attending *lettorato* via Facebook University groups,

where I posted the form asking them some questions concerning the role university mother tongue language assistants have in motivating their learners.

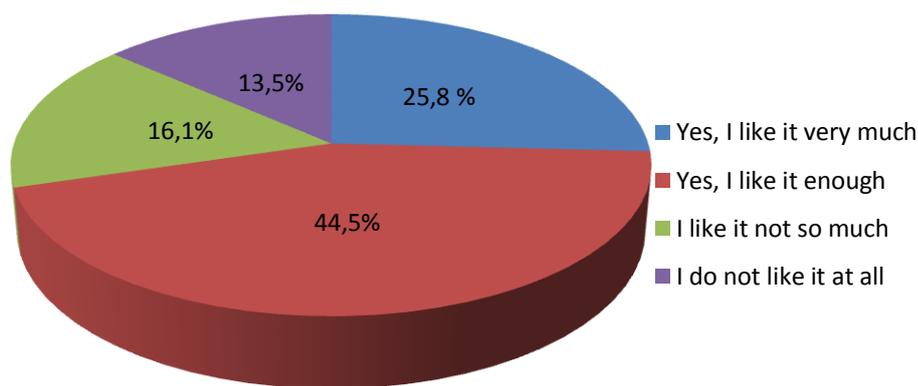
The complete form is attached in the Appendix of this work. The questions were written in Italian, to facilitate learners in answering them.

I elaborated and included eight questions in the questionnaire. The first two questions, concerning the degree students attended ( Bachelor Degree or Master Degree) and the language they study, have been already treated in Chapter 3.

I will rather focus my attention on the question of the questionnaire asking learners if they like the way the language they study is taught. The results follow:

- Yes, I like it very much : 40 people ( 25.8 %)
- Yes, I like it enough : 69 people (44.5%)
- I like it not so much : 25 people (16.1%)
- I do not like it at all : 21 people (13.5%)

I here represent these data by means of a pie graph:



Graph 3. Students appreciation of the letturato

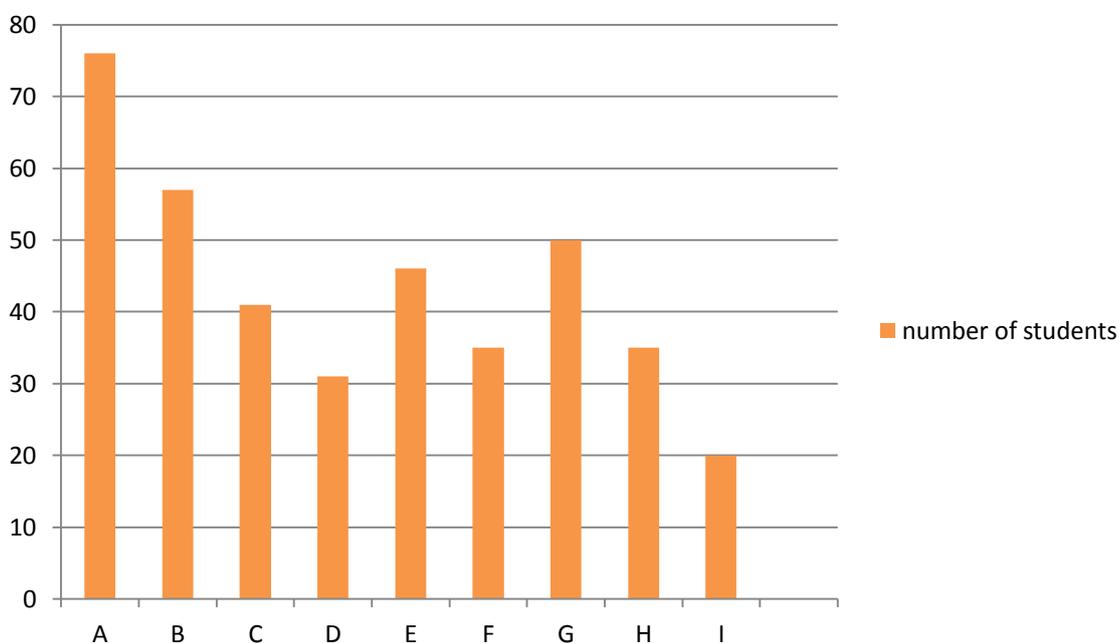
Graph 3, above, points out that most of the learners attending *lettorato* in the surveyed University are satisfied with their learning experience : a total number of 109 students (40 people like it very much + 69 people like it enough) out of 155, which is the number of learners answering the questionnaire, appreciate it.

A much lower number of students, 45 students (25 people like it not so much + 21 people do not like it at all ), do not have a positive opinion of the *lettorato* they attended.

Implications about this data will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Then I proposed two questions regarding what students liked and disliked about the teaching practice of the chosen language.

The fifth question of the questionnaire asked the factors students liked and answers are represented in Graph 4, which follows; explanation is after the graph.



Graph 4. The factors students liked the most in lettorato

Graph 4 represents the factors students liked most in the *lettorato* they attended; moreover there are some notes they wanted to add and they are included in the column 'other' (column I ). These factors are pointed out in the graph with a capital letter in alphabetical order from A to I, as follows:

A: the language assistant is helpful and patient (76 learners )

B: the language assistant makes lessons interesting (57 learners )

C: the language assistant presents tasks clearly ( 41 learners )

D: the language assistant points out the course goals from the very beginning ( 31 learners)

E: the language assistant proposes varied and diversified teaching materials (46 learners)

F: the language assistant increases students' self-esteem ( 35 learners )

G: the language assistant aims at improving autonomy in learning ( 50 learners )

H: our relationship with the language assistant is based on mutual trust and listening (35 learners )

The rest of the students gave different answers included in the square 'other' of the possible answers ( column I in Graph 4) They are both positive opinions about the *lettorato* ( such as for example 'the language assistant is very competent and does his job well', 'the language assistant uses humor to make the lesson enjoyable' , 'the topics touched on will be useful for my future job' ) and negative points of views about it ( like 'I was not satisfied with the assistants I had' , 'teaching methods should be improved', 'the language assistant made the lesson boring, he/she was never helpful, he/she was not competent' , 'Classes were overcrowded') .

Each student was allowed to answer more than one option in this question.

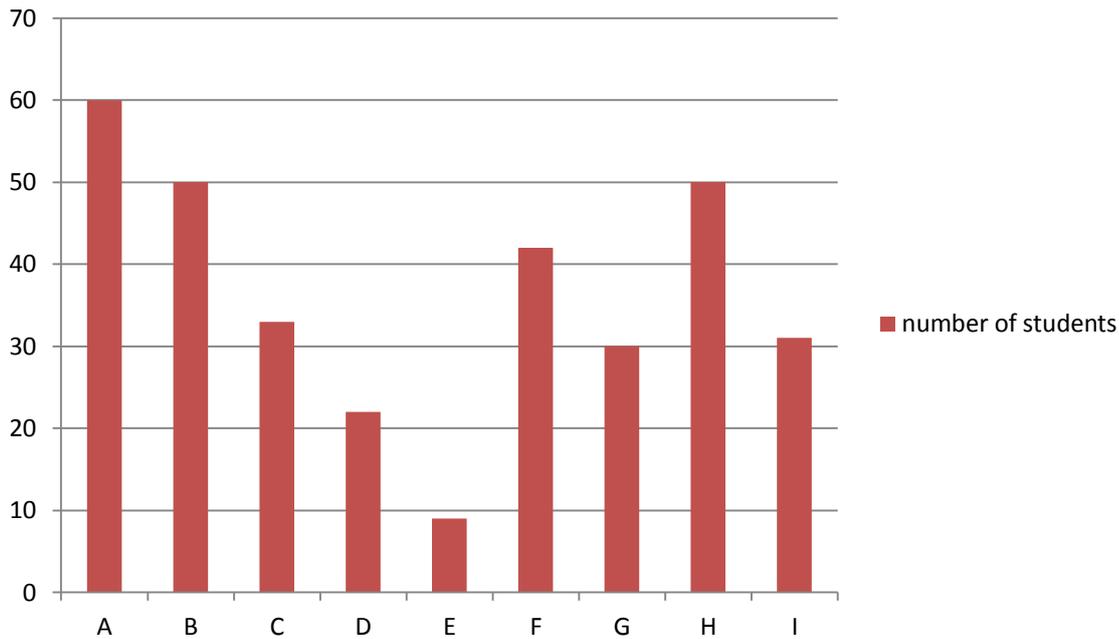
The next question of the questionnaire asked learners which aspects are missing in the teaching proposal of the language they study. The participants to the survey answered in this way:

- A. more varied and diversified lessons ( 60 students )
- B. more interesting lessons ( 50 students )
- C. a more serene classroom atmosphere ( 33 students )
- D. helpful assistants ( 22 students )
- E. less difficult lessons ( 9 students )
- F. goals clarified from the beginning of the course ( 42 students )
- G. assistants aiming at improving the autonomy of the learners ( 30 students )
- H. assistants looking for a higher self-esteem of learners ( 50 students )

The answers included in the square '*other*' are referred with the letter I; the main ones follow:

'none of the above mentioned factors is missing during *lettorato*', 'I would like more lessons', 'less crowded classes', 'an improvement of the teaching materials and additional ones', 'a clearer specification of the requirements of the final exam from the very beginning of the course', 'more interaction in class and less pattern drills', 'the free choice by students of some topics that will be treated in class the following lesson', 'better prepared assistants', 'clearer explanations by the language assistants', 'a support to excel in learning the chosen language', 'intermediate training work', updated texts', 'a different teaching approach valuing reasoning and comprehension rather than learning by heart' .

Graph 5, representing the data obtained in this question, follows. The missing motivational factors are pointed out with letters A-I above and in the graph.



Graph 5. The missing motivational factors in lettorato, by students

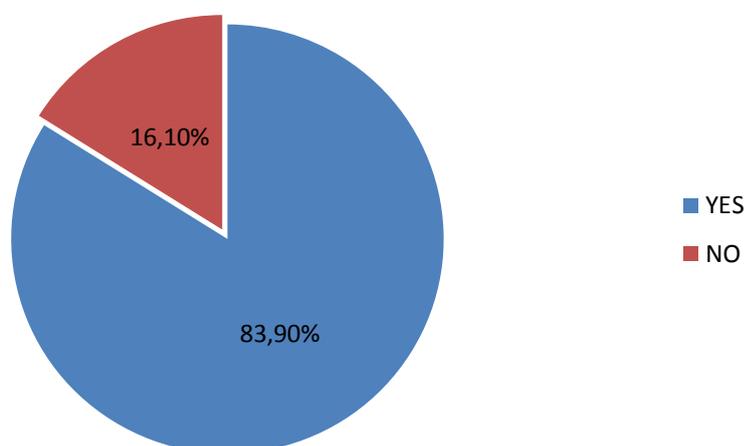
Most of the learners think that the teaching proposal should be more varied and interesting ( 60+50=110 people), about a third of the whole group of surveyed students (42 people) believe that assistants do not explain clearly their teaching objective. According to another third ( 50 people) language assistants need to better their approach with students by enhancing their students' self-esteem, and about a fifth of them ( 30 people) asks for an improved work on their autonomy, by teachers. Another fifth ( 33 students) marks that the class environment should be more peaceful, thus a more successful learning experience will be accomplished.

A few students focus on the fact that assistants are not helpful ( 22 students) and lessons are too difficult ( 9 students ).

Above are the main motivational factors the lettorato is missing according to the questioned learners. The final discussion will comment on the implications they present.

The following question asked if students feel motivated to keep on studying the language they have chosen or not. The results of the investigation are : 83,9 % YES and 16,1 % NO.

The pie graph that follows represents these data :



Graph 6. The intention of students about keeping on attending *lettorato* or not

The last question of the questionnaire I administered to university students attending *lettorato* is an open-ended question: I asked why they are motivated or not to continue studying the chosen language.

The results will be grouped in some main reasons listed below.

The reasons about '*continuing studying the language*' concern:

### 1. the language:

- 'because I like this language' ( 57 learners )
- 'because I like very much this culture' (7 learners )
- 'because I think learning a language never ends' ( 3 learners )
- 'because it is challenging' ( 4 learners )

- 'several opportunities are offered to improve the mastery of the language and the knowledge of the culture, and it increases the interest in keeping on studying this language' ( 1 learner )

## **2. the assistant :**

- 'I want to keep on learning this language autonomously ( 4 learners )
- 'because English is very important nowadays and the role the assistant have is fundamental for improving the knowledge of this language ' ( 1 learner)
- 'because the assistant has stimulated my interest for this language' ( 5 learner )
- 'because our assistant is very good and competent' (1 learner)
- 'because the *letturato* is very involving' ( 1 learner)
- 'because, on the whole, I am satisfied of the *letturato*' ( 2 learner )
- 'because the assistant supports learners that need it and makes everyone reach a good level' ( 1 learner )

## **3. the student**

- 'because I think this language will be useful for my future career' ( 22 learners )
- 'because I want to become a teacher '( 1 learner)
- 'because I want to obtain my degree' ( 3 learner )
- 'because I want to widen my point of view' ( 1 learner )
- 'because I want to learn this language well' ( 5 learner )
- 'because studying this language is my goal ' ( 3 learner )
- 'because I feel I have a particular aptitude for learning this language' ( 1 learner)
- 'because I feel I am improving' ( 7 learner)

The results about '*stopping studying the chosen language*' regard:

**1. the assistant:**

- 'because language assistants are not competent and clear' ( 4 learners )
- 'because language assistants do not manage to pass their enthusiasm for learning' (2 learner)
- 'the quality of the *letturato* is not satisfying' ( 2 learner)
- 'because I would feel anxious keeping on attending *letturato*' ( 1 learner)
- 'because lessons are repetitive and the assistant does not facilitate the dialogue' ( 2 learners)
- 'Classes are too crowded (3 learners )
- 'because assistants made me hate the language I have chosen to study' ( 1 learner)

**2. the student:**

- 'I feel no motivation to continue attending *letturato*' ( 3 learners)
- 'I will continue studying this language abroad' (4 learners)
- 'because the final exam is too difficult compared to the level of the course I attended' (3 learners)

I opted for resuming similar ideas the 155 students provided in one point each, thus the majority of them were formulated by more than one learner each.

Moreover I decided not to represent these last results by means of a graph because the factors influencing the choice students make to keep on studying the language or not is better explained listing them as I have done.

### 4.1.3. Questionnaire N. 2

The questionnaire I administered my students of French at *tutorato*, named *Tutorato e motivazione*, firstly asked what they expected from *tutorato* and then investigated what effectively students liked and did not like regarding this learning experience; it also gave some suggestions to improve this teaching practice.

I will report the main results of Questionnaire N. 2, the ones leading to formulate a meaningful final discussion; I will consider the most important information from the three dates when the questionnaire was administered to students ( 12<sup>th</sup> April, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 24<sup>th</sup> May ), together .

Considering all the three dates of the investigation learners affirmed mostly that *tutorato* is expected to :

- put in practice what they had learnt during lessons
- support learners to pass the final exam;
- train them with the language, especially orally (in order to become more self-confident);
- clear up their doubts;
- help them to improve their knowledge of the language

To the question *Do you like the way tutorato is proposed ?* all the surveyed students in all the three dates answered they liked it (very much /enough).

The factors meeting the higher learners' appreciation during the whole period of *tutorato* ( question 3) are ranked in the following list:

1^ the tutor is helpful and patient

2^ the relationship with the tutor is based on mutual trust and listening to

3^ tasks are presented clearly

4^ the teaching proposal is interesting and diversified

5^ the tutor tries to increase learners' autonomy and self-esteem

The following question asked what learners did not like about the *tutorato*. They claimed that lessons became little by little more crowded, thus time dedicated to each one was less and less, even if the tutor tried to give equal attention to everyone.

They also asked for having a longer conversation time and more listening activities; moreover they would like to study in depth grammatical rules. Finally they wrote that they would like cooperation among each other.

To question 5 ( *Which aspects are missing ?*) students answered mainly this:

- more complex and challenging activities
- a teaching approach aiming at increasing the autonomy of learners
- a more interesting and varied proposal
- more conversation time

Learners stated that they felt strongly motivated to keep on attending *tutorato* until its end (question 6).

Finally they added some personal considerations about *tutorato*. Overall they showed their satisfaction about the course and its usefulness for the exam. I report some of their opinions: « it's a well done course and it is very useful to improve the knowledge of the language », «this laboratory is within everybody's reach », «the tutor is competent, helpful and she makes everybody comfortable», « even if I expected something different, I like the learning proposal and I think it is very interesting, thus I am happy I participated to the *tutorato* »

A final discussion underlining the importance of the results obtained to understand the role university mother tongue language assistants have will be performed in the following

section, considering all the data I obtained from the interviews to language assistants, Questionnaire 1. administered to university students attending *lettorato* and Questionnaire 2. responded to by university students participating in my French *tutorato*.

## **4.2. Discussion**

This section will consider the results I obtained from my investigation, which I explained above, and discuss the implications they have.

I will perform the discussion by examining each of the research questions I formulated and wrote in chapter 3, one by one. I will take into consideration both the points of view of the language assistants ( obtained from the interviews ) and the university students attending *lettorato* ( got by means of Questionnaire N. 1), thus a comparison of these views and a global discussion about the role university assistants have will be possible.

Then I will also consider the data I got from Questionnaire N. 2 I administered to university students participating in my French *tutorato* and I will write some main reflections I did comparing the results of Questionnaire N. 1 and Questionnaire N. 2 as regards the opinions university students have about the motivating teaching practice of language assistants and language tutors.

### **4.2.1. Research Question n. 1**

Here I will answer my research question number 1, which is:

*What motivational strategies do language assistants adopt to generate, maintain and protect motivation in their university students? Which strategies are neglected or rarely used?*

Before starting to discuss the implemented strategies, a premise is needed : the investigation I conducted highlighted that some language assistants ( 3 out of 17) believe that university students learning a foreign or second language do not need to be motivated, they are already motivated to attend the courses, because they have personally chosen to study that specific matter, while another language assistant informed me that his university students of Spanish appear little motivated, given that often they opt to attend Spanish lessons only because this language seems easy to learn and pleasant to listen to, thus they lack a strong intrinsic motivation.

Indeed intrinsic motivation is the core of the motivation a learner should have when he/she chooses to start studying a language ( see Deci and Ryan' s *Self-Determination Theory* presented in Chapter 1 of the present work) and the role the assistant plays is first to increase this motivation in their learners or help them to understand if they have a strong personal reason that pushes them to face the difficulties learning a language involves, and work on it. As some assistants pointed out , the intrinsic motives learners have become the real motivation driving the assistant in his/her work; learners are inspired by their assistants' enthusiasm that in its turn derives from students' passion in learning, thus a virtuous circle begins. To sum up I report a statement an assistant told me : «students' motivation is a mixture of inner drive and external inspiration ».

In order to feel learners have a strong intrinsic motivation for learning the chosen language, assistants also try to make lessons pleasant and enjoyable, given that pleasure is

considered the first factor stimulating internal learning drives ( see Balboni I mentioned in Chapter 2). Assistants create pleasure in learning by varying lessons as much as possible ( approach, materials, tasks, etc..), proposing interesting and topical authentic material, involving learners to be active participants rather than passive receptors, and teaching the foreign language but also the culture of people speaking it, comparing the Italian culture and the foreign one, thus promoting learners intercultural competences; also concerning grammar, some assistants explained to me that they teach contrastive grammar, highlighting the differences and similarities between learners' mother tongue ( usually Italian ) and the foreign language they study.

In addition, assistants believe that trying to make the teaching environment serene is the right way to start a good lesson and carry out a successful learning experience. For example language assistants try to encourage learners to train without fear of making mistakes, thus stimulating them to learn with pleasure and peace of mind, and strengthening their self-confidence.

At the same time, when working with small groups of learners, assistants pay attention to every learners' needs and identify the motivations and interests each one has, thus a targeted teaching intervention is assured; unfortunately , as assistants affirm, this is rarely possible because university classes usually have a big number of students.

What is always possible is that language assistants facilitate their students' learning process, which is also hoped. An assistant explained to me that they consider university learners as young adults who need to be guided to face language learning but whose autonomy shall always be considered and promoted. This assistant of English made this interesting metaphor : « the language assistant ( and teacher ) is like a doctor: the doctor can help his patient to recover but it is up to the patient to get better, the same is in learning: the assistant can help students to learn but it is up to them to learn»

These are the main strategies mother tongue language assistants I interviewed implement so as to motivate their learners.

Most of them agree on the fact that adopting adequate motivational strategies depends on the group of students they have: in a small group they get all learners to express themselves, they can personalize the teaching proposal and support each student, while with a larger group this is more difficult, thus they create work groups where students cooperate (*cooperative learning*) to reach the learning goals.

#### **4.2.2. Research Question n. 2**

Research question number 2 is :

*Given the Ten Commandments for motivating language learners resulting from an empirical study by Zoltàn Dörnyei conducted in the school context, are there any differences in the strategies university language assistants implement compared to the commandments Dörnyei formulated? Are there any similarities? Why can this be interesting ?*

For all the strategies I will consider here, I refer to the classification Dörnyei elaborated in 1998, which I presented in the previous section 4.1.1.3, and to Graph 1, representing the most frequent use of the Dörnyei's Ten Commandments by university language assistants. Among the seventeen interviewed language assistants, nine of them agree on implementing Strategy 2<sup>^</sup>: *create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.*

Thus in this case the high grade of importance language assistants give to this commandment corresponds to the high position Dörnyei placed it in his ranking (2<sup>nd</sup>).

In addition, a high number of assistants (10) gave Strategy 5<sup>th</sup> ( *increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence* ) a great relevance and a good significance was given also to Strategy 7<sup>th</sup> ( *promote learner autonomy* ). It is evident that considering only the university system, where learners are requested to study longer texts and more complex subjects autonomously, improving learners' autonomy is seen as essential.

A further strategy widely popular among the interviewed language assistants is Strategy 4<sup>th</sup>, which is '*develop a good relationship with the learners*'. It appeared to be as relevant for Dörnyei's investigation as it is in my survey: assistants agree on the fact that if teachers begin a positive relation with their students and this condition is maintained all over the school path, the results of the learning process take advantage of this.

Strategy 6<sup>th</sup> ( *make the language classes interesting* ) obtained a medium position also in the ranking I got from my survey, so it might be considered that this strategy is not a priority in the teaching agenda, but it is rather important as well.

Strategy 3 in the survey by Dörnyei ( *present the task properly* ) was chosen by five assistants in my investigation, thus placing it in middle-low ranking; some assistants explained that they take this strategy for granted.

Strategy 10 ( '*familiarize learners with the target language culture*' ) gained the same importance as the 3<sup>rd</sup> : as one assistant stated, there are some cultures, such as the English one, which are universally known.

In the lowest position according to my investigation, there are Strategies 1, 8 and 9, which are respectively '*Set a personal example with your own behavior*', '*Increase the learners' goal-orientedness*', and '*Personalize the learning process*'. An explanation follows.

Language assistants stated that they do not use Strategy 1 very much, they rather plan learner-centered lessons, which focus on interests and needs learners have.

In the group of the three Strategies, ‘Increasing the learners’ linguistic self-confidence’, ‘Promoting learner autonomy’ and ‘Increasing the learners’ goal-orientedness’, which are all related to enhancing a specific attitude of the learner by language assistants, the last one is not a priority in the teaching agenda, while the others are far more implemented.

As far as Strategy 9 is concerned, the investigation shows that its implementation is not always possible, because, as I explained in the section 4.1.1.4, the big groups of students usually attending *lettorato* make it hard for assistants to personalize the teaching proposal.

Table 3, which follows, shows the position each strategy has in Dörnyei ranking ( the Ten Commandments ) and the number of university language assistants choosing each of them. This last number is taken from Graph 1, representing the most frequent use of the commandments ( see page 53).

<b>Number of university language assistants choosing it</b>	<b>Position in the ranking by Dörnyei</b>	
10 assistants	Strategy 5 <sup>^</sup>	Increase the learners’ linguistic self-confidence.
9 assistants	Strategy 2 <sup>^</sup>	Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
7 assistants	Strategy 4 <sup>^</sup> , Strategy 7 <sup>^</sup>	Develop a good relationship with the learners.  Promote learner autonomy.
6 assistants	Strategy 6 <sup>^</sup>	Make the language classes interesting.
5 assistants	Strategy 3 <sup>^</sup> , Strategy 10 <sup>^</sup>	Present the task properly.  Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

4 assistants	Strategy 1^, Strategy 8^, Strategy 9^	Set a personal example with your own behavior.  Personalize the learning process.  Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
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Table 3. Number of language assistants choosing the Ten Commandments

I opted for proposing language assistants to focus on Dörnyei's *Ten Commandments* because this researcher is a very important one, maybe the most important nowadays, in the field of learning motivation, and his article '*Ten Commandments for motivating language learners: results of an empirical study*' (1998), presenting a ranking of the most relevant strategies language teachers implement , based on a survey he conducted, have represented a reference framework for my case study: it gave me the opportunity to make a comparison between university language assistants choices and this major research by Dörnyei (1998).

#### 4.2.3. Research Question n. 3

My third research question is :

*Are university mother tongue language assistants sensitive to their students motivational needs ?*

I will answer this question by means of the data I obtained from Questionnaire N. 1 I administered to students of the surveyed University. These data are shown in the section *Results* of Chapter 4.

The results show that the majority of the learners attending *lettorato* are satisfied with it: 70.3% of them like it 'very much' or 'enough' ; the rest of the students appreciate it less. I will explain their main reasons.

The highest appreciation students give to assistants is to their helpfulness: according to several learners language assistants are available when needed and they support students in their learning process, they are patient and repeat the most difficult points of the lessons if requested. Moreover about 20% of the questioned students stated that they can rely on assistants. For numerous students assistants also formulate tasks properly, but learners have opposite opinions concerning the way goals are communicated : about one fifth of them thinks they are well explained while another fifth believe they are not.

Students are also divided between who believes lessons are interesting and who believes they are not. The same is about a varied teaching proposal: in fact almost one third ( 46 people) of the questioned students approved it as regard to the types of materials assistants proposed and find them involving, while a little more than one third (60 people) pointed out that they would like a more diversified teaching experience.

Furthermore students are quite happy about the degree of autonomy assistants give to them to carry out the set tasks, but learners think assistants give a too little importance to increasing their self-esteem.

Several students formulated personal positive opinions about the work done by assistants: they underlined for example the competence and professional behavior that is their trademark, the capacity some assistants have to use humor and thus make lessons enjoyable, their enthusiasm in teaching the language and their supportive attitude.

Therefore language students in the surveyed University have a rather positive opinion concerning the way assistants implement the above mentioned motivational strategies, even if they have opposite views as regards some points, as I explained in the previous paragraphs.

Furthermore, the number of students who do not agree with the positive impact of language assistants on their motivation is marginal, as well as learners who strongly disagree ( see page 59). I would rather focus the attention of the reader on some elements learners have underlined concerning the language assistants' approach, the location where *lettorato* is held and the materials/instruments used : they claim that often classrooms are too crowded, teaching materials should be updated or added to (like optional exercises ) and sometimes also intercultural units need to be improved.

Some other students also asked some assistants to change their teaching approach, valuing reasoning, comprehension and interaction among peers and with the assistant.

Anyway, almost 84 % of the questioned learners affirmed that they will keep on with their language studies, included attending the *lettorato*. This information confirms the data about the appreciation of the *lettorato* I reported above (more than 70 % of the learners like it ): university students attend *lettorato* with pleasure and they are quite satisfied about the way it is done.

Therefore mother tongue language assistants teaching in the surveyed University of the North of Italy are generally sensitive to their students' motivational needs and interests.

#### **4.2.4. Research Question n. 4**

My last research question, which I will answer here, is Question n. 4:

*What are the differences and similarities concerning the perception learners have about the motivational teaching practice a university mother tongue language assistant implement compared to the ones a university language tutor adopts?*

I will consider Questionnaire 1 (about *lettorato*) and Questionnaire 2 (about *tutorato* of French language and civilization ) regarding the perceptions learners had on the motivational strategies respectively the language assistant and the tutor implemented, and I will focus my attention on these three points:

- Do you like it ? What aspects do you appreciate?
- What aspects are missing ?
- Are you motivated to keep on attending *lettorato/tutorato*?

The majority of students, both of *lettorato* and *tutorato*, appreciated these learning experiences (very much / enough). The most important aspect both group of learners liked is that assistants and the tutor were helpful.

Moreover several students attending the *lettorato* perceived that assistants proposed interesting lessons and improved their autonomy, while the majority of the learners participating in the *tutorato* appreciated mostly the relationship of mutual trust and listening with the tutor and they also believed that increasing learners' autonomy was sometimes missing in the tutor 's agenda, even if I made an effort to achieve also this objective.

In addition both the two groups of learners had divergent opinions concerning the varied teaching proposal : some believed that the assistant/tutor presented diversified materials while some others think they do not.

Students of *lettorato* also found that language assistants do not always explain teaching objectives clearly, while, as for learners of *tutorato*, the tutor usually communicated clearly

goals and tasks of the lessons, but some learners attending it asked for more complex tasks to carry out.

Furthermore increasing learners' self-esteem was seen as less considered by both assistants and the tutor, according to learners, who also expected an increased cooperation with each other.

Finally, the majority of the learners attending *lettorato* and *tutorato* believe that they will keep on participating in language lessons because, generally speaking, they think that assistants/the tutor are competent, supportive, and they transmit their own enthusiasm in teaching the language. Students of *lettorato* for example motivate their choice by saying that they like the language and the culture they are studying and they think learning them is challenging due also to the several opportunities the University offers to improve the language; moreover one learner said that he wants to continue attending *lettorato* : «because English is very important nowadays and the role the assistants have is fundamental for improving the knowledge of this language »

### **4.3. Conclusion**

My case study aimed at investigating the role university language assistants plays in their learners' motivation and analysing the most implemented motivational strategies and the neglected ones.

The theoretical framework I dealt with in Chapter 1 represented a relevant input to my research. My investigation confirmed the *Self-Determination Theory* by Deci and Ryan (1985) I dealt with in Chapter 1, in fact according to the interviewed assistants, a good learner should be intrinsically motivated, and, given that the difficulties he/she encounters in his /her learning path might be a lot and consequently motivation is likely to diminish and

discouragement to increase, the role language assistants have is to maintain and keep alive the motivation each student naturally has.

I considered the *Ten Commandments for motivating language learners* Dörnyei had formulated in 1998 as my frame of reference, and I compared the strategies pointed out by this researcher with the choices of the interviewed assistants of an University in the North of Italy.

Language assistants explained to me that they implement different motivational strategies depending on the type and size of the learning group they have and the activity they are carrying out, thus a good enough motivator chooses the adequate strategy for each learning situation, without the need to implement them all. This confirms what Dörnyei states: « no motivational strategy has absolute and general value because such strategies are to be implemented in dynamically changing and very diverse learning contexts, in which the personality of the individual learners and the teacher, as well as the composition and structure of the learner group, will always interplay with the effectiveness of the strategy» (Dörnyei, 1998: 224).

The Ten motivational Commandments elaborated by Dörnyei are almost all implemented by the interviewed language assistants, each of them choosing the strategies he/she finds more suitable to the specific learning context and his/her own teaching approach.

Among the strategies language assistants declare they rarely use is Strategy 8, '*Personalize the learning process*': on the one hand language assistants can hardly put it in practice because of the numerous classes, on the other hand, university students demand a more personalized teaching proposal, thus a strengthening of its implementation should be devised.

The point of view of learners was surveyed by means of two questionnaires.

In order to provide a more complete overview of the efficiency motivational strategies have, I administered Questionnaire 1 to learners attending *letturato* and I also proposed Questionnaire 2 to students participating in the French *tutorato* I hold in the same University, which both examined learners perceptions about these learning experiences; moreover I compared the results of the two Questionnaires.

I had a positive feedback from the university students in both cases:

- as for Questionnaire 1 I opted for posting it on Facebook because young people use this social network very much and my request met their need to express their points of view about *letturato*, so numerous students responded
- even if Questionnaire 2 was addressed to a limited sample of students (around ten), almost all the participants in *tutorato* answered the questionnaire and the results gave an interesting picture of the positive aspects and the critical points of this learning activity.

Students had divergent perceptions regarding the implementation of some motivational strategies by the assistant and the tutor, and I can suppose it is due, especially in the *letturato*, to the fact that students are very numerous and assistants find it difficult to adjust their teaching to everyone's needs and interests.

Moreover learners, studying in the surveyed University, appreciated and found particularly motivating civilization lessons language assistants offer to them, which help them improve their intercultural competences and increase their interest in keeping on studying the chosen language.

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# Appendix

1. Interview to language assistants
2. Questionnaire 1. *La motivazione ad apprendere una lingua*
3. Questionnaire 2. *Tutorato e motivazione*

Dear teacher,

I am a student of Language Sciences in Ca' Foscari and I am conducting a research about motivation in learning, for my graduation thesis.

My objective is to investigate the strategies language assistants adopt, those ones they prefer and those they neglect when teaching.

I kindly ask you to answer three questions about this topic.

Question 1 : how do you usually motivate your students to learn? Could you please point out ten strategies you adopt and put them in order according to your teaching experience, from the most useful to the least?

*Question 2* : I list here Ten Commandments for motivating language learners resulting from an empirical study by Zoltàn Dörnyei , a very important scholar researching in this field. Here they are:

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
3. Present the task properly
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence
6. Make the language classes interesting
7. Promote learner autonomy
8. Personalize the learning process
9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture

What I ask you is to put them in order from the one you find more useful to the least . It's ok if you list the numbers 1-10 corresponding to the commandments above.

*Question 3* : are there, among these commandments above, some you find not important?

Could you please explain why ?

Please write your answer in Italian, English or French as you prefer.

I inform you that your contribution will be considered anonymously in my thesis.

Thank you very much for your help. I will keep you informed about my research, if you wish.

Best regards.

Eliana Zanin

# La motivazione ad apprendere una lingua

Ciao a tutti. Mi chiamo Eliana e studio Didattica delle Lingue a Ca' Foscari. Chiedo gentilmente a voi studenti delle lauree triennali e magistrali di rispondere a questo breve questionario che propongo per raccogliere dati per la mia tesi. Le domande riguardano la vostra motivazione a studiare le lingue e il ruolo dei vostri lettori di madrelingua in questo. Richiede un minuto per la compilazione e ogni contributo è per me prezioso. Grazie.

\*Campo obbligatorio

## 1. Quale corso di laurea frequenti ? \*

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- laurea triennale  
 laurea magistrale

## 2. Che lingua studi ? \*

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Inglese  
 Francese  
 Tedesco  
 Spagnolo  
 Portoghese  
 Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Perché studi questa lingua? \*

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- ti piace  
 la trovi facile da studiare  
 pensi sia utile per il tuo futuro lavoro  
 Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Ti piace come viene insegnata ? \*

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- sì molto  
 sì, abbastanza  
 poco  
 no, per nulla

**5. Cosa ti piace nella didattica di questa lingua? \****Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

- il lettore è disponibile e paziente
- il lettore rende la lezione interessante
- il lettore presenta le consegne in modo chiaro
- il lettore ha indicato fin da subito gli obiettivi del corso
- il lettore propone materiale didattico vario e diversificato
- il lettore incide positivamente sulla nostra autostima
- il lettore mira ad accrescere la nostra autonomia nell'apprendimento
- il nostro rapporto con il lettore si basa sulla fiducia e l'ascolto reciproci
- Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Quali aspetti mancano nella didattica di questa lingua? \****Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

- lezioni più varie e diversificate
- lezioni più interessanti
- clima di classe più sereno
- lettore più disponibile
- lezioni meno difficili
- obiettivi del corso chiari fin da subito
- ricerca dell'autonomia dello studente
- incremento dell'autostima dello studente
- Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Ti senti motivato a proseguire lo studio di questa lingua? \****Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- SI
- NO

**8. Perché? \***

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# Tutorato e motivazione

Carissimi studenti che frequentate le mie ore di tutorato di lingua e civiltà francese per il 1° anno, vi chiedo gentilmente di rispondere alle seguenti domande elaborate a scopo di raccolta dati per la mia tesi di laurea, che indaga la motivazione dello studente universitario a fruire delle opportunità didattiche proposte dall'università e il ruolo del docente relativamente a questo fattore. Il modulo vi sarà proposto tre volte: all'inizio delle attività di tutorato, a metà e alla fine. Vi ringrazio per la collaborazione. Eliana Zanin

\*Campo obbligatorio

## 1. Cosa ti aspetti dal tutorato di lingua francese? \*

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## 2. Ti piace come viene svolto ? \*

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- sì, molto
- sì, abbastanza
- poco
- no, per nulla

## 3. Cosa ti piace? \*

*Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

- il tutor è disponibile e paziente
- le attività proposte sono interessanti
- le consegne vengono spiegate in modo chiaro
- il materiale didattico utilizzato è vario e diversificato
- il tutor incide positivamente sulla nostra autostima
- il tutor mira ad accrescere la nostra autonomia nell'apprendimento
- il nostro rapporto con il tutor si basa sulla fiducia e l'ascolto reciproci
- Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Cosa non ti piace ? \*

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**5. Quali aspetti mancano a tuo parere ? \****Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

- attività varie e diversificate
- proposte didattiche più interessanti
- maggiore chiarezza nelle consegne
- maggiore continuità nelle attività proposte
- attività più facili
- clima in classe più sereno
- tutor più disponibile
- ricerca dell'autonomia dello studente
- attività più complesse
- incremento dell'autostima dello studente
- Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Ti senti motivato a proseguirne la frequenza ? \****Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
no, per nulla	<input type="radio"/>	sì molto				

**7. Vuoi aggiungere una considerazione personale ?**

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