Adapting Dörnyei and Csizér's "Ten Commandments for Motivation" to the non-English Major Japanese University Classroom

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Abstract

In the 1990s, research on language learner motivation moved away from a social-psychological approach towards one that was more education centered. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), at the forefront of this paradigm shift, formulated a set of "ten commandments" for motivating language learners. In this paper I will demonstrate how these commandments, based on Western ideals, can be adapted for the Japanese classroom by offering suggestions for practical application. Where cultural differences limit application, I will propose viable alternatives and will then reprioritize in order of importance, based on the needs of Japanese non-English majors.

Introduction

Teaching a non-English major university class for the first time can be challenging for the rookie teacher. Students are invariably ill equipped for the class in terms of both mental and physical preparedness, and show little interest in the class and even less interest in applying themselves. Their attitudes can also range from passive-resistant to openly hostile. These are all obstacles that may seem insurmountable at first, but understanding that the issues are all motivational at root is the first step towards being able to rectify the problem.

Research on language learner motivation in the 1990s saw a shift away from the social-psychological approach initiated by Gardner and Lambert (1972) towards a "more pragmatic education-centered approach… consistent with the perceptions of practicing teachers and… more relevant to classroom application" as described by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998). The two researchers formulated a set of "ten commandments" ranked in order of importance for motivating language learners, supported by empirical data gathered from two hundred English teachers in Hungary based on their beliefs (reproduced in table 1). In this paper I will show how these commandments, based on Western ideals, can be best applied to the unique setting of the Japanese classroom and will provide viable alternatives where cultural differences limit application. I will then reprioritize the commandments based on what our native English teaching faculty consider to be the needs of Japanese non-English majors.

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Table 1　Dörnyei and Csizér's "Ten Commandments for Motivation" (1998).

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks 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.

I. Dörnyei and Csizér's "Ten Commandments for Motivation"

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior

Teachers in Japan traditionally command respect. However, this respect should be earned. Aside from having a deep understanding of and enthusiasm for the subject being taught, and an eagerness to impart this knowledge, the teacher should set an example that instills respect. The teacher should not expect students to be eager to learn if he does not show eagerness himself. Neither should he chastise students for being late and unprepared if he is so himself. Classes should start on time with the room sufficiently lit, as well as heated or cooled, and the equipment properly prepared. The teacher should also be fresh-faced with a positive demeanor.

If the teacher is prepared to use Japanese in class, invariably he will make mistakes. Far from being an issue this shows us as human and as fallible, and as someone willing to try regardless. Students may follow this example and are also encouraged to make mistakes and learn from them. The use of L1 in the ESL classroom has been a hotly debated topic (Cianflone, 2009), although I support its judicious use as it benefits class efficiency and student motivation.

2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom

When the teacher walks into the classroom on the first day, more often than not students are sat in cliques at the back of the class, with the occasional loner on their own and only the very keenest student(s) at the front. The atmosphere may seem relaxed, but it is not one conducive to language study. Effective class management requires establishing group cohesiveness and group norms (Dörnyei, 2014), and these are best implemented on the first day of class. Cohesiveness can be achieved by breaking up cliques and altering the seating arrangements to the teacher's wishes, allowing students to sit with whomever they wish within a designated area, but with the understanding that partners will be rotated throughout the duration of the class and then return to the original seating arrangement for quizzes at the end of class. Similarly, on day one, a set of rules by which the students are expected to abide, and the penalties for infractions, must also be established. Ideally, students' input should be encouraged, so as to democratize the process, but realistically this is too alien a concept for our students, so settling for agreement regarding the fairness of the rules is second best.

Students invariably respond well to clearly defined roles, only requiring the occasional reminder, but when they do not, disciplinary issues should be dealt with calmly, avoiding direct confrontation.

Conversely, often the problem with a relaxed class is that activities can become raucous and may need to be reined in. Personal chatter should be tolerated to some degree, especially if the class system requires frequently changing partner, but students should be directed to stay on task.

3. Present the tasks properly

For lower-level classes, the textbook can act as an antithesis to the job it is supposed to do. Students can feel intimidated by books swimming in a language in which they have little confidence. Furthermore, the language used to explain tasks is often at a higher level than the tasks themselves. To overcome these issues, I propose pre-teaching the key grammar points, ensuring that students have at least a working understanding before even opening the textbook. And to avoid losing the attention of the students and to efficiently maximize class time, I recommend the judicious use of L1 when explaining complicated tasks or for one-to-one remedial assistance.

Classes should also have a cyclical pattern, finishing where they have started, by reviewing what has been learned in class reinforcing belief that the goals set at the beginning of the class have been met and instilling a sense of achievement. Tasks should not be allowed to peter out, but should be effectively time managed to avoid any overspill into the following class.

4. Develop a good relationship with the learners

Developing a good relationship with your students requires empathy. We invariably come from different backgrounds, so should try to reach out to them in an attempt to understand who they are and what their struggles as language learners are. Oftentimes our students' have a poor relationship with English, they have failed at it in the past and feel that it is something they cannot 'do'. Being sympathetic to their struggles — that often extend beyond the classroom — rather than chastising them creates a bridge between that gap.

We should also present a human face — in other words, a real person behind the tie. Our students' opportunities to interact with native English speakers may be limited. They are intrigued by our lives and will enquire into them. The content of lower-level language classes is often personal in nature, so where the class requires, we should be willing to answer students with whatever we feel comfortable, avoiding anything that is too private.

Student-teacher interaction should not be limited to class time. Wherever possible, the teacher should make himself accessible. Lower-level students benefit from being greeted with words of encouragement as they enter class and from remedial assistance after class. If time allows, hang around after class and talk to the stragglers as they leave, and enquire into their lives. This is also the opportunity to reach out to students with attendance issues, rather than to reproach them in front of the whole class, thus saving them face.

5. Increase the learners'linguistic self-confidence

How can we as teachers increase students' linguistic self-confidence, when our students feel they have little grasp of the language? There are two areas that need to be addressed: class goals need to be achievable, and real-time feedback needs to be provided. This can be done by carefully modeling the concept, monitoring students and providing assistance where needed, eliciting responses by breaking down language into simple components, and avoiding spoon-feeding answers. Further feedback can be

given by setting simple quizzes at the end of class that are achievable by the majority of students, with the focus being on reinforcing students' sense of self-belief rather than evaluating their performance. Once students break out of the rut of perceived failure and have a sense of achievement, no matter how small, they are much more willing to apply themselves. Alfred Bandura (1997), the leader in the field of self-efficacy, recognized that "people's levels of motivation… are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true" and we, as educators, instinctively know this is true — it is all in the mind.

6. Make the language classes interesting

Language learning at the lower level can be monotonous, with a lot of repetition and drilling. This is invaluable to the learning process and cannot be avoided. However, the monotony can be broken up by varying the type and content of tasks and by rotating students after each substitution or activity.

Textbooks are often designed so that the format is repeated every unit or every other unit, and student familiarity with the system promotes class time efficiency. However, if the teacher is to pre-teach the class point beforehand, their approach should vary as much as possible (employing dictation, YouTube clips, song excerpts) wherever possible inferring meaning so that students can claim ownership of the concept.

7. Promote learner autonomy

Left to their own devices students are unlikely to choose their own educational direction. When it is often a challenge to get students to even answer questions, let alone ask them, how can we expect students to take on the responsibility of choosing their path as language learners? Culturally, this is an alien concept for most of our students. Giving students a say in what they learn, how they learn or what grade they should be awarded — all common in the West — is likely to be met with confusion. This is the job for the teacher.

I have experienced mixed levels of success in a large heterogeneous semi-autonomous writing class, where students were expected to read basic model emails searching for useful phrases and patterns that they could use in their own email. After understanding the structure of the class, those students with the greater ability — read motivation — were able to proceed through the course, occasionally asking the teacher for guidance completing the classwork, submitting homework and rewrites on time. Lower level students needed constant reminders of the course structure with the worst offenders trying to skip fundamental stages in the writing process in an attempt to short-cut the system and produced work inferior to their abilities. Despite making myself available for assistance (in Japanese and English) for the duration of the class, this type of student rarely asked for help, prefer to wait to be asked by myself. Left to their own devices the worst offenders would happily let the class pass buy without achieving anything.

I have had far greater success when awarding students the role of "teacher"— a clear example of learner autonomy at its best. One benefit of pair rotation is that a weaker student will often be paired with a stronger one. By allowing students to confer with each other before the teacher elicits answers from the group, the stronger student takes on the role of "teacher." Peer-assisted learning increases understanding for both parties: the "teacher" gains a more in-depth understanding through the act of explaining the language to the "student" (Nutt, 2014). This also has the added benefit of the weaker student saving face in this situation.

One final example of autonomy I have employed is the use of independent open-ended

questionnaires to give students a free voice when evaluating the class, using their recommendations to adapt and develop the course for future students.

8. Personalize the learning process

At the elementary level the language learned is invariably that which can be used in a personal setting. Accordingly, wherever possible language should be personalized. Rote learning is of little use unless the students can adapt the conversations to themselves. In controlled practice, once grammar functions and conversation patterns have been learned, students should substitute their own information into the conversations. The appropriate vocabulary should be introduced at the pre-teaching stage at the beginning of class before the textbook is opened. Personalizing at this stage has the additional benefit of ensuring the student fully understands what they have learned and reinforcing their confidence in their ability to use language for their own needs. At the final stage of controlled practice, having face-to-face dialogs and maintaining eye contact, thus precluding reading, further enhances the effect of holding a "real" conversation. Towards the end of the class in more free practice, "five-finger challenges," where students count on their hands each time they speak in a dialog sitting across from each other with their books closed, further reinforces the sense of achievement for the student.

On a broader scale, the syllabus should be adjusted to the students' needs. Our current conversation program is aimed at equipping students with the knowledge to be able to talk about themselves when asked by someone outside of their culture, be it a foreign teacher or on a study abroad program.

9. Increase the learners'goal-orientedness

The psychologist Edwin Locke pioneered research into goal setting and motivation in the late 1960s, realizing that employees were motivated by clear goals and appropriate feedback (Locke, 1968). Language learner goals can either be those achievable in the short term or more long-term aspirational goals. An example of a short-term goal is to learn to the level of application the goals of the class. The teacher should aid this by making such a goal achievable by the majority of the class and providing appropriate feedback (through mini quizzes) to ensure that the learner is aware that the goals have been met. Longer-term goals could include improving ones TOEIC score or attending a study abroad program. The teacher should inform students of what is available to them, and offer support and encouragement where needed.

10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture

Without context it can be difficult to motivate students to study. Feeling they have little or no use of the language, students may see little point in applying themselves properly. With no sense that globalization directly affects their lives, it often takes a trip abroad for students to realize that there is a world outside of Japan where English is highly valued. Often when students return from such trips they are about to start their second or third year, missing the opportunity to take full advantage of the English classes available at our college. Failing this, how can we awaken our students to the relevance of English? The native English teacher is the window to another culture, and it is the teachers' responsibility to foster interest in the world outside of Japan. There is no denying that globalization is here to stay.

Dedicating the occasional class (one a semester) to a cultural event has many benefits. Students get an insight into the culture, see language applied in its natural setting, the monotony of study is broken up, a sense of reward for hard work is given, and students feel they are given time off. A Christmas lesson or

one dedicated to analyzing a pop song are good examples. In questionnaires students often respond that these classes are the most enjoyable of the course, perhaps because they feel as if they are not studying, when in fact their batteries are just being recharged.

II. Reprioritization of the "Ten Commandments for Motivation" by the native-speaker teaching faculty

Dörnyei and Csizér acknowledged that they could not "say with certainty that the ten commandments are valid in every cultural, ethnolinguistic and institutional setting" (Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998), although despite the cultural differences between Japanese and Western students of English, for the most part they can be applied to the Japanese classroom. Our native speaker teaching faculty of eleven teachers — ten male and one female — including the author, is made up of British, American and Canadian nationals, each with over ten years' teaching experience in Japan, many with double that. They were given the list of commandments and asked to rank them from one to ten in order of importance when teaching low-level non-English majors. The teachers' (a-k) ranks can be seen in Table 2. The means were then taken of each commandment, which were reprioritized with the lowest mean taking the first position (Table 3). While there were notable differences in how the teachers ranked the commandments, perhaps reflecting differing teaching styles and personalities, common themes were also observed.

Table 2　Teacher's ranking of the ten commandments compared against the original ranking

Original position	Teachers' new positions (n=11)											mean
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	
1	3	3	7	9	6	7	4	7	8	6	1	5.55
2	1	2	1	1	1	2	6	5	5	7	4	3.18
3	4	1	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	3	2.64
4	2	7	4	10	2	4	5	8	6	5	7	5.45
5	7	4	2	4	7	1	8	3	3	2	5	4.18
6	5	5	6	2	5	6	1	1	4	3	8	4.18
7	10	10	10	6	10	8	9	9	9	10	9	9.09
8	6	9	5	8	9	9	7	4	7	8	2	6.73
9	8	6	8	5	8	5	2	6	1	4	6	5.36
10	9	8	9	7	3	10	10	10	10	9	10	8.64

Table 3　"Ten Commandments for Motivation" for Japanese non-English majors
(Revised version based on native English teachers' experience, n=11)

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

III. Revised "Ten Commandments for Motivation" for Japanese non-English majors

1. Present the tasks properly
Clearly presenting tasks was ranked in the top four by the whole of the teaching faculty making it the lowest scoring commandment. Our students tend not to be pro-active and need guidance and instruction at all times. They can easily loose interest if they are unsure what is expected of them. If tasks are clearly presented, in L1 or otherwise, then class efficiency is promoted and students are not lost before they start. (originally position 3)

2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
Creating a pleasant relaxed environment maintained its position and was ranked first by four teachers and second by two teachers. The importance of classroom management is paramount. It is only when classroom management issues are dealt with that the framework can be set for learning to begin. (originally position 2)

3a. Make the language classes interesting
Textbooks can be repetitive in nature at the elementary level and, although this promotes learning and classroom efficiency, it can lead to students losing interest. The veteran teacher should employ a variety of methods to introduce and reinforce language concepts and present tasks in a variety of methods. (originally position 6)

3b. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence
Sharing third place was the need to increase students' linguistic self-confidence. Japanese students are less likely to have confidence in their linguistic ability than their Western counterparts, so instilling a sense of self-efficacy is one of the biggest challenges for the teacher to overcome. It is also the most rewarding for the teacher and student alike and the greatest motivator. (originally position 5)

5. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness
The pathway to achieving self-confidence is through setting achievable goals and providing students the real-time feedback they need, that these goals have been met. The importance in setting achievable goals, in the eyes of our teachers, saw this commandment rise higher than any other, in the revised version. (originally position 9)

6. Develop a good relationship with the learners
Being empathetic towards our students' struggles as a compassionate, yet authoritative teacher helping those in need of additional support while effectively managing classroom issues, creates a healthy relationship with the students. Interestingly, the distribution was wide for this commandment: two teachers ranked it second and one teacher ranked it last – presumably more authoritarian than authoritative. (originally position 4)

7. Set a personal example with your own behavior

A high level of professionalism is expected at Japanese universities, and if a teacher is fulfilling the aforementioned commandments it goes without saying that he is setting an example. This drop in rank is the largest when compared with the original commandments. I do not think that this is because teachers do not believe professionalism to be important, rather that the other commandments are more important. (originally position 1)

8. Personalize the learning process

Being able to personalize what they have learned without the use of teaching aids in the later stages of the class through face-to-face interaction brings relevance to the class and cements the students' understanding. This commandment maintained its position. (originally position 8)

9. Familiarize learners with the target language culture

When the majority of English speakers are those who learned it as a second language, what is the target language culture? Emphasis should be on the importance of English as the lingua franca of a shrinking globalized world, rather than old world models. Interestingly though, one teacher did rank it third. Presumably that teacher has a strong cultural identity. (originally position 10)

10. Promote learner autonomy

Learner autonomy is a relatively new concept in the West and has yet to really catch on in Japan, with its fixed hierarchical structures. For this reason it was ranked in one of the two lowest positions, by all but two teachers. However, if peer-assisted learning or student questionnaires can be interpreted as a form of learner autonomy, then this qualifies it a position in the ten commandments. (originally position 7)

Conclusion

Good teaching method is universal, applicable in Japan and the West. By focusing on the top five revised commandments, root problems with self-efficacy, thus motivation can be overcome and effective learning achieved. Students can move from the *Eigo dekinai* (I can't speak English) camp to realize that they can 'do' English.

Tertiary education reform in Japan is progressing, driven by internal and external pressures. Recent initiatives by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to develop real-world problem-solving competence through "active learning" are a step in the right direction. Any deviation away from the passive spoon-fed approach towards awarding our students a greater "voice" should be applauded. However, I do not think our students have the emotional maturity yet for the process to be truly democratized. Decisions on class rules, grades, or direction of study are expected to be wholly decided by the teacher with the student only adding their agreement. UTT,

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