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DISCOVERING THE UNDERLYING FACTORS AFFECTING  
DEMOTIVATION IN ANGLOPHONE LEARNERS OF MODERN  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Holly Sallah

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METAPHORS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING:  
DISCOVERING THE UNDERLYING FACTORS AFFECTING DEMOTIVATION IN  
ANGLOPHONE LEARNERS OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

A thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Modern Languages  
The University of Mississippi

HOLLY SALLAH

May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

In response to increased levels of demotivation in anglophone students of modern foreign languages, this thesis attempted to discover potential underlying causes through the use of metaphor elicitation directed at tertiary learners in the United States of America. Students were asked to metaphorize both the language learning process and the role of the language teacher. Afterwards, a qualitative metaphor analysis revealed that participants were overwhelmingly positive in respect to the role of the language teacher, but more mixed in their metaphors regarding the language learning process, with high frequency words such as “work” and “skill”. Contrary to the literature, the role of the teacher was not seen as a factor affecting demotivation, but rather the unending and difficult nature of the work involved in learning a language. Teachers can counter these points of demotivation by introducing more process (vs. product) language instruction into their classroom as well as setting more numerous short-term (vs. long-term) goals and explicitly teaching remotivation strategies which opens critical lines of communication necessary for student and teacher success alike.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

SLA	Second Language Acquisition
L1	First (or native) Language
L2	Second Language
L2MSS	L2 Motivational Self System
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
ICFF	Indirect Coded Corrective Feedback
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
MFL	Modern Foreign Language

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of English as a global language has had many profound consequences in the field of language learning. One unfortunate consequence is the growing amount of demotivation experienced by students of anglophone countries when learning modern foreign languages (Lamb, 2017). Regrettably, it can be quite high, especially in classrooms where language classes are often compulsory and the value of such is not immediately apparent to the students (Littlejohn, 2008). There is still a paucity of data on demotivation (particularly when compared to motivation research in general) but the attitudes and competence levels of teachers have been cited as underlying causes as well as characteristics of the class or textbook (not relevant, outdated, etc.). Even other external factors such as the broader sociocultural context of the region or country can be influential as well (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011; Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009; Lamb, 2009). However, in order to truly understand the underlying factors causing such demotivation among anglophone learners and potential ways in which to combat them, it is important to elicit the beliefs of the language learners themselves in their current context. Such beliefs can be obtained through the use of a qualitative metaphor analysis as it can draw forth beliefs that can not be raised consciously any other way (Wan et al., 2011; Tabata-Sandom et al., 2020 ). By utilizing such a tool, it may be possible to discover the core factors underlying the demotivation of these students and suggest possible solutions, much-needed for learners and teachers alike.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is a powerful and dynamic force. Its presence is intuitive, felt by all, yet even after six decades of research, scholars have not been able to pin down a precise, comprehensive definition of motivation (Dörnyei, 2020, pp. 4-21). Is it a steady, consistent ‘trait’, a transitory ‘state’, or an on-going ‘process’? Its nature is worth discussing because it bears a weighty importance in the language learning process. The most difficult problem faced by teachers is not preparation of material or style of teaching, but rather finding ways to motivate students, to make the work appealing and interesting (Wilson and Wilson, 1916, p. iv). As the students’ motivation waxes and wanes, so too does their rate of language acquisition. Thus, while there are certainly other influential factors involved in the language learning process (language aptitude, Critical Period Hypothesis, etc.), motivation stands as a towering pillar of importance in SLA (Dörnyei, 2001; Williams, 1994). Helping teachers to understand and manipulate motivation is paramount to student success in the language learning process.

As it currently stands, motivation has been defined under three different categories: that of a consistent, stable trait (*e.g. Sally is a motivated person*), as a temporary (but relatively enduring) state (*e.g. a job loss deflated Sally’s motivation*), and as an ever-changing process with ebb and flow (*e.g. as Sally navigates finding a new job*) (Dörnyei, 2020, pp. 4-21). While scholars have yet to decide in which category motivation primarily resides, there is evidence of motivation behaving in all three manners. For instance, in SLA, some students are more consistently motivated than

others, yet even those same students can experience a waning of motivation during specific situations such as a difficult concept or a bad test score, and even within a single class period, various distractions can cause changes in enthusiasm and commitment levels (Ibid, p. 5). Thus, teachers should be concerned with and be able to differentiate between all three 'levels' of motivation as they seem to manifest themselves at different times and places.

As it pertains to the language learning classroom, however, it is perhaps most helpful to view motivation as primarily more of a process, being that it is clear to see its ebb and flow among students of all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) throughout the day, even as one recognizes that there are some students who begin the process with higher levels of motivation than others (due to it also being a more stable personality trait). As Ushioda corroborates, "within the context of institutionalized learning especially, the common experience would seem to be motivational flux rather than stability" (1996, p. 240). Maintaining consistently high levels of motivation is difficult for students and many distractions, both internal and external to the classroom, can easily cause their motivation levels to rise and fall. Thus, it is important that teachers garner a plethora of strategies to deter falling motivation levels in students, increase low motivation levels, and sustain high ones. It is not an easy job, and much depends on the student as well, but to the extent that a teacher can positively influence motivation, they should.

There are two main strategies that teachers can employ: the first, finding and incorporating positive motivational strategies, has been the focus of much SLA research (Lamb, 2017). The second, and the focus of this thesis, locating and counteracting demotives, has not yet amassed such scholarly attention and remains an under-developed area of research (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). Both are useful, and while it is perhaps easier to introduce a positive rather than counter a negative, both are needed to influence and stabilize the oft fluctuating motivational processes in

SLA (Littlejohn, 2008). Since these strategies complement each other, both should be researched and implemented, not just the first.

As to the first, many scholars have tackled various angles of finding and incorporating positive motivational strategies in the classroom. Lamb, in a meta-analysis of SLA motivational literature, demonstrates that a growing body of research has empirically shown that motivational strategies (MotS) really do work and are correlated with more motivated behavior in the classroom and more positive attitudes towards learning and the second language (2017). These strategies, over 100 strong, are instructional techniques deployed to generate, sustain, and enhance learner motivation. Examples include promoting learner autonomy or creating a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom. In addition to MotS, there are alternate theories of motivation that have been applied to language education, the most prominent of which are: Self-determination theory, the L2 Motivational self-systems theory (L2MSS), and Social Cognitive theory. In the L2MSS theory articulated by Dörnyei (2009), which has garnered much attention recently, three constructs--the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience--best explain and predict learner motivation. Engaging the Ideal L2 self, or how the learner sees themselves as competent future L2 users, is important in creating the much-needed intrinsic motivation necessary for language learning.

Lamb (2017) also discusses research in which authors study the effects of applied strategies or innovative teaching approaches in the classroom. Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is a dominant theme in this section. This is seen to be particularly motivational because it adds a sense of authenticity to the classroom as L2 learners are as 'tech-savvy', if not more so, than their teachers. There have also been calls for a greater integration of culture and language teaching as culturally authentic materials have been recognized as having motivational potential.

As a specific example, Lai and Tai, expanding on Dörnyei's theory and CALL motivational strategies, conducted a study where they looked at the motivational effect of incorporating social media activities into the classroom (2021). They believed that by interacting with those in the culture around them through social media (particularly with native speakers), they would close the gap to not only their Ideal L2 Selves but their ideal (multi)cultural selves as well. Essentially, social media-related activities in the mainstream language would positively motivate the students as it would allow them to feel a blending of the two cultures (Berry, 1997). The findings were in support of their hypothesis, with "empirical evidence in support of the positive contribution of self-initiated everyday social media activities to language learners' current and aspired self-concept management and the concomitant language learning motivation" (Lai & Tai, 2021, 9). Thus, introducing self-initiated social media activities into the classroom is a highly probable way of positively motivating students because it allows them to take control and move towards their Ideal L2 and Cultural Selves.

Many other scholars have written articles focusing on finding other specific positive motivational strategies, such as Tang and Liu, who studied the efficacy of indirect coded corrective feedback (ICCF) in L2 writing (2018). Here, ICCF refers to feedback given in the form of code that students can self-check with a code guide sheet given beforehand to help in error correction. Specifically, the authors examined the difference between ICCF with and without short affective teacher comments on L2 writing performance, learner uptake, and motivation. Essentially, does the addition of short affective teacher comments to ICCF increase writing performance, learner uptake, and motivation?

The results indicated two useful pieces of information. First, the study found no significant difference in writing performance or learner uptake between the two groups. That is, ICCF alone

was sufficient and the additional affective teacher comments were not necessary when focusing solely on L2 writing performance and uptake. However, it did have an effect on motivation. The results showed that the treatment group members were aware of the different roles of the feedback they were receiving from the teachers. In their eyes, ICCF was more useful in signaling *linguistic* issues while the short affective teacher comments provided an *affective* driving force so learners could improve their writing. Because of the encouragement given by the comments, the treatment group reported being more motivated to think more deeply and to make more mental effort to attend to the language issues revealed by the ICCF, something not reflected in the comparison group. Overall, while not necessary for correcting linguistic issues, the motivational strategy of adding short affective comments to feedback did indeed play a role in increasing student motivation.

While different scholars have focused on other strategies (Moskovsky et al., 2012; Sugita et al., 2014; Wong, 2014; Alrabai, 2016), overall the research shows that it does make a statistical difference introducing various positive motivational strategies into the classroom. Every teacher should certainly make attempts at utilizing them as motivation plays such a pivotal role in language acquisition. However, implementing positive strategies is only one side of the coin; efforts should also be made to unearth and counteract demotives, or the negative influences hampering positive motivation in students. Only by combining both together can the issue of motivation in students be truly addressed.

## **2.2 Demotivation in Language Learning**

To date, few scholars have explored the ‘darker side’ of motivation, or demotivation (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). According to Dörnyei and Ushioda, demotivation concerns

“specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action” (Ibid, p. 139). Thus, demotivation does not mean a total lack of motivation, rather that, while some positive motivation may still remain, there are external forces suppressing or dampening it. For instance, a student may still believe generally that a language is worth learning even if he/she struggles to find relevance with, for example, outdated pedagogy or curriculum in the classroom, which is a demotive or negative influence. To the author’s knowledge, in the literature on demotivation, there is not any explicit mention of internal factors of demotivation, such as language aptitude issues. Even so, they should be considered as well because the end result is the same: a restricting of a learner’s positive motivation. In this thesis, demotivation is defined as any and all forces that inhibit or reduce a student’s motivation. Thus, a student can be demotivated because of a variety of sources such as an uncaring teacher, irrelevant pedagogy, societal influences, etc.

Even though research into demotivation is still relatively new, it can reveal what factors may be suppressing students’ motivation, both external and internal to the classroom. This is especially relevant in anglophone countries where students are highly demotivated when it comes to the study of foreign languages (Lamb 2009). Where it exists, research on demotivation highlights the role of teacher relationships and attitudes towards the students, characteristics of the classroom itself, and the broader sociocultural or sociopolitical context.

Demotivation research was popularized in the last decade of the twentieth century with studies by Chambers (1993), Dörnyei (1998), and Oxford (1998). They found that negative teacher attitudes and classroom/subject characteristics can exert significant influence in the classroom. For instance, Oxford found, after carrying out a content analysis on the essays of 250 American students about their learning experiences, that there were four main categories of

contention: 1) the teacher's personal relationship with the student (lack of caring, hypercriticism, etc.), 2) the teacher's attitude towards the course or the material (lack of enthusiasm/competence, etc.), 3) style conflicts between teachers and students (too much detail, amount of class structure, etc.), and 4) the nature of classroom activities (irrelevance, repetitiveness, etc.). The ability level of teachers and any overtly negative attitudes they choose to display have strong links with students' motivation and can cause high levels of demotivation if not corrected. In a follow-up study in 2001, Oxford concluded that teacher behaviors and attitudes associated with too much or too little control in the classroom were perceived to be demotivating. In short, there are strong links between teacher behavior and attitudes and student motivation and performance.

Dörnyei (1998) and Chambers (1993) echo Oxford's conclusions. To explore underlying causes in demotivated students, Dörnyei conducted interviews with 50 particularly demotivated students, identifying and tabulating primary demotivation. He found that 40% of the occurrences directly concerned the teacher and his/her attitude, commitment, competence, and teaching method. An additional 15% of the occurrences concerned the learner's lowered self-confidence through indirect actions of the teacher such as harsh grading, etc. Other significant issues were inadequate school facilities and negative attitudes towards the L2. Chambers found much of the same although he placed a caveat on his conclusions: yes there were recurring themes, but what one student liked, the other did not. That is, not every factor has the same universal demotivating potential. Some students prefer more teacher control, some less, and so while demotivation is certainly a problem, there is no one universal solution. What is important is that teachers open up lines of communication and cooperation with their students so that demotivating factors can be addressed (Chambers, 1993; Ushioda, 2009).

More recent studies have also discussed various demotivating factors internal to the classroom. For instance, Littlejohn (2008) suggests that demotivation is caused by curtailing students' autonomy. He states that language teachers often focus on "fun" or "dynamic" activities to avoid demotivation believing that lasting motivation is something best stimulated externally, not realizing that such activities only temporarily increase motivation because of their lack of sustainability. He believes, based on the literature of the psychology of motivation, that lasting motivation is not external but something that "naturally rises based on conducive circumstances" (p. 216; Dörnyei, 2001). Because of this, he believes that something is wrong with the very organization of teaching and learning which systematically causes demotivation in many learners. Thus, a teacher should see their job as not only motivating learners, but also as avoiding their demotivation through careful attention to the structural organization of the classroom. Such organization should be focused on four factors: the locus of control, a sense of value and purpose, the preservation of self-esteem, and feelings of success. For example, if all the decision making lies in the hands of the teacher, then the students have no locus of control and can become demotivated. Based on his theory, the author suggests that a lack of these factors is what drives a lot of demotivated surface behavior.

Demotivation internal to the classroom can be caused by more practical issues as well. A study on first-year students of German in UK universities found that too much negative corrective feedback, or too little as well, can increase demotivation in students (Busse, 2013). When feedback comments are generalized and not specific enough to help students, intrinsic motivation decreases as the students perceive the feedback as a sign of their incompetence (Deci and Ryan, 1985). On the other hand, if feedback is too specific or comprehensive, then students do not know in which area to focus on for improvement, which also causes increased levels of demotivation (Busse,



2013). Thus, Busse cautions that while feedback is important, the feedback that students receive is often demotivating, an issue that should be addressed. He argues for more transparency of assessment procedures and marking schemes, an enabling of students to carry out their own self-assessments, a more process-oriented approach (vs. product-oriented), progress feedback combined with strategy instruction, and twice as much positive feedback as negative feedback. Essentially, it is crucial to instill a sense of progress within first-year students in order to increase their self-efficacy levels.

Other studies also touch on demotivating factors directly related to teaching practices in the classroom. In a study on demotivating factors affecting Vietnamese university EFL students, Tang and Baldauf (2007) found that teacher-related factors were the leading cause of student demotivation (38%) with ineffective or improper teaching methods, shown in the figure below, constituting the highest sub-group (26%).

Figure 1: Teacher-related Demotivating Factors (Tang & Baldauf, 2007, p. 94)

Category	N	Percentage
<b>ETb. Teacher behavior</b>	<b>24</b>	7%
ETb1. insult students	4	
ETb2. lack of care, enthusiasm	13	
ETb3. strict, inflexible	5	
ETb4. demonstrate favoritism	2	
<b>ETc. Teacher competence</b>	<b>14</b>	4%
ETc1. fail to pronounce, difficult to understand	6	
ETc2. low credibility	8	
<b>ETm. Teaching method</b>	<b>97</b>	26%
ETm1. uncreative, boring ways of conveying knowledge	39	
ETm2. teaching language skills incomprehensively	22	
ETm3. speed of teaching is too fast	10	
ETm4. ineffective distribution of L1 & L2 use	6	
ETm5. lessons limited to textbook	6	
ETm6. repeated lessons from class to class	1	
ETm7. different teaching methods among different teachers	1	
ETm8. frequently test students	11	
ETm9. inappropriate workload	1	
<b>ETg. Grading and assessment</b>	<b>5</b>	1%
ETg1. test outside lessons	2	
ETg2. not equal to students' levels of proficiency	2	
ETg3. no corrective feedback	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>38%</b>

The learning environment (learning conditions, classroom atmosphere, L2 use outside school, etc.) also accounted for a third of the external factors related to demotivation among the students. Echoing earlier studies, the authors suggest that when there is a mismatch between teaching style and student preferred learning styles, serious demotivation can occur. As a potential solution, the authors posit that “surveying students’ expectations of teachers and satisfaction with methodology in tertiary courses can make teaching more effective and more closely aligned with student needs” (Ibid, p. 100). In areas where teachers can more align themselves with student’s expectations, thereby countering demotives, an increase in motivation is likely to follow.

In Japan, however, it seems that the dominant pedagogy, more so than teacher attitude or behavior, causes demotivation (Falout et al., 2009). In Japan, grammar translation is the dominant pedagogy for the first six years of the students’ English education, and its focus on rote vocabulary and grammar rule memorization can seriously dampen students’ motivation. In fact, the negative effect of the methodology outweighs the motivating influence of the teachers, which most of the students in the study found to be quite inspiring (Ibid, p. 410). Thus, while teacher attitude itself may not be an issue for these students, their pedagogical method seems to have detrimental effects.

While a sizable portion of demotivation seems to be concentrated in factors internal to the classroom, there exist significant factors external to the classroom as well. In anglophone countries, the expansion of English as a global language significantly demotivates foreign language students (Taylor & Marsden, 2014). The transformation of English into a hegemonic global language has reinforced the idea that L1 English speakers need not learn other languages as everybody wants to learn English (Demont-Heinrich, 2009). In the United States, enrollment in university classes (undergraduate and graduate) for languages other than English dropped 9.2% between 2013 and 2016 (Looney & Lusin, 2019). Reports are the same in the United Kingdom, where foreign

language learning becomes optional in secondary school. Enrollment in foreign language classes has declined steadily for over a decade ([UK] Department for Education, 2010).

To investigate this, Taylor and Marsden staged two short interventions designed to increase the relevance of foreign languages and studied their effect on students' attitudes and perceptions (2014). In the United Kingdom, foreign language classes are only compulsory until the tenth year of school. The interventions, a panel of professionals discussing language learning relevance, both personal and societal, and multimedia language lessons taught by external university teachers, were targeted, therefore, at year nine students. They found that while the interventions did not correlate with an increase in class enrollment (due to their short nature), the students did experience "heightened appreciation of the general value of languages following participation in the panel discussion about real-life stories of needing and/or using languages in a variety of circumstances" (2014, p. 912). Thus, there is some evidence that even socio-political causes of demotivation can be countered.

Overall, demotivation as experienced by students is incredibly multifaceted. Teachers, certainly, have a large role to play as negative behaviors and attitudes towards the foreign language significantly damage students' motivation. Students' perception of the teacher's competence levels also factors into demotivation as well as the pedagogy employed. In addition, there are factors external to the classroom that can increase demotivation such as the sociocultural and sociopolitical context surrounding the languages. L1 English students perceive other foreign languages as unnecessary, with little value and relevance to their lives, thus curtailing much motivation to learn them. With so many potential factors influencing L1 English students' demotivation, it is important to understand which factors are most significant to them in order to begin to solve the problem.

### 2.3 Metaphor Analysis

Metaphor is, in its essence, “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). By utilizing metaphor, humans can grasp and categorize difficult or abstract concepts. Even so, it was long thought of as simply a rhetorical or poetical device. However, it is actually quite pervasive not only in language, but also in thought and action. Indeed, the human conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (Ibid).

The extent of metaphors used in the human conceptual system often goes unnoticed consciously, but it is expansive nonetheless. Many common yet dominant concepts such as love and hate and happiness and sadness among others are often expressed metaphorically. For example, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY is used quite often in language: “I went looking for love,” “Her love spurred me onward,” “I would cross the ocean for you.” The roots of metaphor reach deep into human language, allowing it to be an extremely powerful tool in eliciting beliefs that would not be able to be expressed otherwise. Indeed, as Lakoff and Johnson collaborate:

In all aspects of life, we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphors. (1980 p.158)

Here it is seen that metaphor penetrates into every type of discourse and communication, making it the ideal tool for belief elicitation in this study (Deignan, 2005).

In language learning, metaphor is a type of narrative that allows learners to explain their experiences with language and people, often in ways other than expressed in the classroom or not even consciously realized (Tabata-Sandom et al., 2020). For example, a student who “regards

language learning as EXPLORATION is likely to adopt an active role and be autonomous as a language learner” (Farjami, 2012, p. 102). While they may not be able to express their desire to be an active and autonomous learner in literal terms, they can certainly use a metaphor such as “learning a language is like exploring a forest” to express the same idea in terms within which they themselves and others can more readily understand.

Analyzing the metaphors that students use to describe their teachers or language learning experiences can prove to be a valuable tool in unearthing the beliefs that lie below the surface. It can allow the researcher to take a ‘snapshot’ of the various forces affecting the anglophone student’s (de)motivation in learning modern foreign languages. In language learning, metaphor analysis can be defined as a “method that systematically examines elicited or spontaneous metaphors in discourse as a means for uncovering underlying conceptualizations” (De Guerrero and Villamil, 2002). As Wan echoes, much of the literature on using metaphor analysis over the last several decades is centered around the idea that using metaphor can bring forth implicit ideas or assumptions, allow for personal reflection, and give the researcher insight into how the participant perceives given topics (2011, p. 404). Thus, framing questions in such a manner as “my teacher is like a \_\_\_\_\_” or “my language learning experience is like \_\_\_\_\_” can produce more accurate, meaningful, and valid results than simply asking students to rate motivating and demotivating factors on a Likert scale or similar instrument.

De Guerrero and Villamil echo other scholars in the conclusion that metaphors play “significant roles as vehicles for reflection and awareness raising” (2002, p. 95). In their study, the authors conducted a metaphor analysis to determine how the participants metaphorically categorized themselves as ESL teachers. They did this by asking teachers to complete the prompt, ‘An ESL teacher is like...’ and afterwards spent time with the teachers deconstructing their

metaphors to identify various elements in them such as *teacher*, *learner*, and *teaching and learning process*. They were also asked to reflect on the theories or assumptions underlying their metaphors and what implications they might have. The authors then examined the metaphors and grouped them into different conceptual categories, finishing with nine total. While all of the metaphors in and of themselves were original, they reflected conventional metaphorical conceptualizations of teachers and learners in the ESL field at that time, which shows that these ESL teachers had acquired and internalized the typical “metaphors and beliefs of their professional field” (Ibid, p. 115). However, they also reflected personal differences in teaching style, attitudes, and beliefs. Thus, the metaphor analysis raised awareness for these educators on just how much metaphorical jargon is introduced and internalized by them in their professional domain and how it is shaped by their own personal beliefs as well. Such awareness raising allows the teachers to gain a better understanding of and change their conceptualization of their teaching philosophy if needed.

Metaphor analysis is also a useful tool for eliciting language learner beliefs. For example, a study by Fang sought to use elicited metaphors to understand how students perceived their experiences of learning English (2015). 120 students at a university in Northwest China were asked to respond to the question: “what is learning English like to you?” and to complete the sentence frame: “Learning English is (like) \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.” The metaphors were then analyzed and categorized according to naturally occurring themes. Of 115 metaphors on learning English, eight categories appeared: *construction work*, *journey/movement*, *playing/leisure*, *exploration*, *experience*, *farming/planting*, *eating and drinking*, and *things*. Almost a quarter of the students said they benefited from learning English with metaphors such as ‘reading a book’ because ‘it can cultivate us’ or ‘traveling’ because ‘we can enjoy a new world’ which implies a high motivation level as the students recognized English would help them in the future. Half of the

students mentioned the demands required in learning English with metaphors such as ‘running a marathon’ or ‘climbing a mountain’ but even though they recognized the difficulties they believed hard work would see them through the challenges, again showing high motivation levels. In fact, only five percent of the students, all from the lowest levels of English, used metaphors that showed high amounts of demotivation. They used metaphors such as ‘being lost in the forest’ or ‘going up into space (too difficult).’ Overall, the study showed positive attitudes towards learning English, even if students believed the language learning process was difficult. However, the metaphor analysis also showed that lower-level students were more likely to suffer from demotivation so teachers should be aware of that and encourage their students. Thus, metaphor analysis was used to obtain and categorize language learners’ beliefs.

Since language learners’ beliefs are not simply reflections of the present moment but draw on evolving interpretations of realities across time, metaphors that students use to describe the language learning process can be complex and multifaceted (Tabata-Sandom et al., 2020). For example, Tabata-Sandom et al. conducted a study to understand what metaphors from post-tertiary learners reveal about their experiences learning Japanese. 159 participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire which would elicit the desired metaphors:

Describe what learning Japanese means (or has meant) to you.

Please use a metaphor to describe it, ... ‘Learning Japanese to me is (or was) like ... ’

Explain why you chose that metaphor.

After analyzing the data, the authors found nine metaphorical categories that the participants used to describe their language learning experiences: *Endless journey, opening a door, climbing, finding another self, enjoyment (but also hard), using a tool, accomplishment, learning new skills, and living*. Within these categories, one can also see the complexity of the metaphors utilized as one

participant described learning Japanese as ‘striving to be a top ballet dancer’ or another as ‘wearing in my favorite pair of shoes.’ In using such metaphors, both the difficulty of the work and the value of the accomplishment can be seen, showcasing a belief set that has evolved over time; language learning is neither only accomplishment or work, but a blending of the two, and many other concepts as well. Thus, when using metaphor analysis, one should always be aware that metaphors, while a wonderful aid in verbalizing mental conceptualizations, are also rich in their complexity and reflect an entire process of language learning, not just one moment in time.

To summarize, metaphor analysis is an advantageous conduit through which to explore the factors that most influence students’ documented demotivation in anglophone countries. By allowing students to use metaphors to express often difficult abstract concepts such as language learning, researchers can elicit student belief sets in a much more detailed manner than through other tools such as Likert scale questionnaires. Metaphor analysis can also increase student awareness of their own belief sets about language learning which could allow them to reflect critically on how they view the process (De Guerrero and Villamil, 2002). Thus, there are many benefits to utilizing a metaphor analysis to understand what factors influence student demotivation.

Overall, this study contributes to closing the gap in research in two main areas. First, while motivation research is plentiful, demotivation is still highly under-researched (Lamb, 2009). Because so many students in anglophone countries experience high levels of demotivation in language learning, it is important to conduct studies that explore what factors cause the demotivation and if there are any potential, much-needed, solutions. Second, while metaphor analysis in and of itself is not a novel data collection instrument, there are not many studies that use metaphor analysis on learners of languages other than English (Tabata-Sandom et al., 2020). Because this study focuses on modern foreign languages, and not English, it would add to another



under-researched area in language learning beliefs. Thus, to close the gaps in the literature of demotivation and using metaphor analysis on learners of languages other than English, this study focuses on the following research questions:

- 1) How do learners of modern foreign languages in tertiary education in the United States describe the language learning process through metaphor?
- 2) How do learners of modern foreign languages in tertiary education in the United States describe the teachers' role through metaphor?
- 3) What are the factors influencing demotivation, as expressed through a metaphor analysis, in learners of modern foreign languages in tertiary education in the United States?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Participants

Students of modern foreign languages at the University of Mississippi were anonymously sent a link to an online questionnaire. 132 students responded in total, 67 responses of which were considered valid for the purposes of this study (completed at least one metaphor elicitation, studying a MFL). Students of Spanish made up 45% of the participants; a large percent, but proportionately appropriate considering the greater number of Spanish sections offered at the university versus other MFLs. Other participants were studying: Italian (16%), German (10%), Russian (4%), Chinese (4%), Arabic (3%), and Swahili (1%). An additional 15% of the participants were studying more than one language at the time. Over half of the participants self-declared as intermediate or intermediate-advanced (61%) with 54% taking classes at the 3xx level. A more detailed profile of the participants, with information about additional language study and travel/study abroad experience is provided in the figure below.

Table 1: Participant Profile (N=67)

Current Language of Study	Class Level (1xx, 2xx, etc.)	Self-Declare as Beginner, Intermediate, or Advanced	Studied Other Languages?	Traveled/Studied abroad?
Spanish 45%	1xx 28%	Beginner 24%	Yes 58%	Yes 52%
Italian 16%	2xx 4%	Intermediate 51%	No 42%	No 48%
Multiple 15%	3xx 54%	Intermediate-Advanced 10%		
German 10%	4xx 1%	Advanced 6%		
Russian 4%	5xx 3%	Multiple 7%		
Chinese 4%	Multiple 7%			
Arabic 3%				
Swahili 1%				

### 3.2 Data Collection (Metaphor elicitation and online questionnaire)

To ensure anonymity and facilitate response times, an online questionnaire (see Appendix A) served as the method of data collection for this study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts; the first explained the voluntary nature of the study and dealt with background information while the second, central to this study, consisted of two metaphor elicitation prompts. The preliminary questions in the first section were necessary for this study in order to investigate potential factors that might have influenced participant responses to the metaphor elicitation prompts, and to establish participant profiles. Such questions also allow for a more nuanced understanding of and answer to research question #3. For example, do travel or study abroad experiences correlate with more positive metaphors about the language learning experience? If so, are they, therefore, a potentially effective counter to language learning demotivation? Thus, such background questions were chosen so as to be able to further explore the participants' metaphors.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of the two metaphor elicitation prompts:

- 1) *Please describe your experience learning the language(s) you are **currently** studying using a **metaphor** based on the following prompt:  
Learning language (X) is (like) \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.*
- 2) *Please describe your experience with language teachers using a **metaphor** based on the following prompt:  
A language teacher is (like) \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.*

These prompts, inspired by other studies on metaphor and language learning motivation such as Fang (2015) and Tabata-Sandom et al. (2020), cover two important areas where demotivation has been known to occur: experiences surrounding the language learning process and the student experience with the language teacher. They call for students not only to produce a metaphor, but also to explain why they chose such a metaphor, which allows for a deeper understanding of the conceptual system each participant has when it comes to the language

learning process and the role the teacher plays in it. Also, using the verb *is* instead of *should be*, allows for more authentic responses about their current beliefs and levels of motivation. The words *currently* and *metaphor* were bolded to serve as extra reminders that the responses should be metaphorical in nature, not simply adjectives describing the process or a teacher. Each prompt was also designed to answer research questions #1 and #2 respectively. Overall, the questionnaire was intended to maximize insight into the potential factors causing language learning demotivation in the participants through the use of background questions and metaphor elicitation prompts.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

It is important to note that since metaphors are not universally understood or interpreted, but rather are a product of the culture and society in which they are formed, any analysis of metaphors will be subjective in nature. Indeed, although metaphor researchers have been sufficiently clear in describing procedures for identifying and gathering data, “specific procedures for analyzing the data once collected are less often explicitly described”, making it difficult for scholars to make use of such reports (Armstrong et al., 2011, p.152). While it is impossible to get rid of all subjective elements in a qualitative analysis, it is nonetheless important to build in systemic check points and triangulation procedures in order to increase the validation of the results. Because the author used an online questionnaire, it was not possible to check researcher interpretations directly with the participants as Armstrong et al. suggest, nor was the author able to discuss interpretations with additional colleagues (Ibid). However, the author consistently checked and consulted the results of other researchers who had done similar work in order to provide more coherence and reliability in the interpretation and classification of language learner metaphors.

Therefore, data analysis of the participants' metaphors followed the strategy outlined by Cameron and Low (1999) and Tabata-Sandom et al. (2020). Cameron and Low suggest to “[generalize from the collected metaphors] to the conceptual metaphors they exemplify, and using the results to suggest understanding or thought patterns which construct or contain people’s beliefs and actions” (1999, p. 88). As these authors state, it is important to create conceptual categories for the metaphors because the various thought patterns that emerge will give insight into what factors are affecting participant demotivation (if any). For instance, if the metaphor analysis reveals a conceptual category where language learning is seen primarily as work, then it would suggest that the difficulty of language learning is a cause of demotivation for the participants. Thus, in concordance with Cameron and Low (1999) and Tabata-Sandom et al. (202), the author:

- 1) Determined a label for and sorted each metaphor.
- 2) Sorted the labeled metaphors into conceptual groups based “on the content of the metaphors and their entailments (i.e., reasons or explanations for their metaphors)” using similar reports by other scholars as a reliability check (Tabata-Sandom et al., 2020, p. 4).
- 3) Examined the conceptual groups for emerging thought patterns and key words.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Language Learning Metaphors

An analysis of the participants' metaphors ( $N=62$ ) reveals nine separate conceptual metaphor groups that had at least three metaphors and a tenth category consisting of all groups with two metaphors or less. These nine categories showcase a variety of beliefs, both positive and negative, about the language learning process. All the conceptual categories will be discussed by means of example metaphors in order to highlight the differences between them.

Table 2: Conceptual Categories of Language Learning Metaphors

<b>Conceptual Category</b>	<b>N=</b>	<b>Example Metaphors (Learning language X is like...)</b>	<b>Entailments (Because...)</b>
1. Learning New Skills	18	Driving; Playing an instrument; Dancing; Riding a bike; Walking; Swimming; Climbing	<i>At first it is really difficult, but with practice and exposure, it becomes easier.</i>
2. Adversary	9	Marathon; Chore; Climbing; Torture; Math; Frenemy	<i>Trying to climb to the top of a mountain of pasta because every two steps you go up, you go down one</i>
3. Problem Solving	8	Puzzle; Rubix Cube; Glasses; Light Switch	<i>Trying to navigate a dimly lit room with your eyes, once you find the light switch, you're golden.</i>
4. School Subject	5	Math; Philosophy; English; 5th grade; Reading	<i>Math because (almost) everything is logical and it all builds on itself</i>
5. Exploration/Journey	5	Road; New Person; Hiking; Marathon/Running	<i>There is always something new to learn or adapt to</i>
6. Cooking/Drinking	4	Baking; Coffee; Firehose	<i>Russian is like baking because</i>

			<i>there's lots of small parts that are easy to mess up if one is wrong but it's also very flexible in word positioning unlike English and French</i>
7. Construction Work	3	House; Card Pyramid; Legos	<i>Chinese is like building legos, because you learn each component and how to use it and put them together to make a complete thought.</i>
8. Communication Bridge	3	Old friend; Culture; Gift	<i>Giving a redneck a macaroon because it makes you feel fancy learning a romantic language and it makes you feel smart and well cultured.</i>
9. Entertainment	3	Roller Coaster; Watching TV; Dancing	<i>Watching a good tv series, because once you start it is near impossible to stop</i>
10. Other (Process; Disorientation; Relaxation)	4	Physical Therapy; Oiling; Waking Up; Bath	<i>Swahili is like waking up after passing out because your brain is swimming but trying to figure out what is happening.</i>

#### **4.1.1 Learning New Skills (N=18)**

By far, the largest portion of metaphors describe learning modern foreign languages as akin to learning a new skill. The continued focus was on the practice of the skill and the acknowledgement that the more one practiced, the easier the learning process became (e.g. *“Learning language is like learning to drive a car, because the more you practice, the more natural it becomes”*). This applied across the board, whether the metaphor focused on skills such as driving or playing an instrument or the more physically demanding skills such as dancing, riding a bike, swimming, or climbing. The metaphors which discussed the later group were more likely to use the word “difficult” such as: *“Learning Spanish is like learning to ride a bike; it can be*

*difficult and unnatural at first, but it takes practice and taking risks. Once you learn, it is natural and exciting*". Here the participant first focuses on the difficulty of the process, only later acknowledging the rewards; the enjoyment one can have from gaining experience in (and eventually mastering) a new skill. It can be seen that this group has focused on "improving or practicing language skills as opposed to identifying an end goal or outcome" (Tabata-Sandom et al., 2020, p.6). In a simple but great summation, for the participants in this category, language learning is like: *"a sport, you get better with practice"*.

#### **4.1.2 Adversary (N=9)**

This second group of metaphors revealed a mentality that perceives language learning to be difficult and frustrating in nature, thus making MFLs an adversary, certainly a struggle, and sometimes, a fruitless one. The range of frustration felt in this group is quite large, going from the slightly more benign *frenemy* frustrated at false cognates (*you hear a bunch of words that you think you know but they actually mean something completely different*) to the one *climbing* and feeling like they are getting nowhere (*learning italian is like trying to climb to the top of a mountain of pasta because every two steps you go up, you go down one*) to the despair of *Sisyphus* (the figure in Greek mythology who must eternally roll a stone up a hill) where language learning has become a endless, fruitless task (*because every time I think I've learned something I'm informed I am completely wrong*). Thus, the perceptions of this group are continuously negative in nature with no mention of any of the positive aspects of language learning.

#### **4.1.3 Problem Solving (N=8)**

This group sees language learning as a problem to be solved (vs. skill to be learned) which suggests that they have a more negative view of the process. For example, one participant stated that: *"Learning Spanish is a Rubix Cube because it is borderline unsolvable without proper*



*instruction*". Here, solving the puzzle is deemed impossible without outside help, thus demonstrating a perceived insufficiency on the part of the participant. Many of the other metaphors take the same view. However, not all the metaphors in this category showcase such a bleak outlook. For another participant: *"Learning Spanish is like seeing the world with clean glasses after having bad eyesight, because you can see and understand the world better"*. In this case, the MFL is the solution, not the problem because it expands and clarifies the participants perceptions of the world.

#### **4.1.4 School Subject (N=5)**

Here, language learning is perceived, in its various ways, to be similar to other school subjects such as Math, Philosophy, English, 5th Grade, and Reading. These metaphors have focused on particular aspects of other subjects that are reflected in the language learning process such as memorization: *"Learning Spanish is like math because you have to memorize things"* or the process of scaffolding: *"Learning Arabic is like math because (almost) everything is logical and it all builds on itself"*. Without further detail, it is uncertain whether the metaphorical bent is positive or negative: are the participants grateful for these characteristics or frustrated by them? One participant perceived language learning to be a regression, as if they were in elementary school all over again: *"Learning Arabic is like being in 5th grade, because we're being taught grammar and being encouraged to read"*. Thus, this group reflects more reactions to particular aspects of language learning, not the overall process.

#### **4.1.5 Exploration/Journey (N=5)**

In many studies on language learning and motivation, participants have viewed language learning as a JOURNEY or EXPLORATION so it is no surprise that some participants here felt the same way (Fang, 2015; Farjami, 2012). Here it seems that the participants understand that

language learning is a process of years, not months. For some, the long process is derived from the seemingly endless new things to learn: “*Learning Spanish is like a never ending road because there is always something new to learn or adapt to*”. For one, it was rather the need to appreciate the journey that motivated their metaphor: “*Hiking through the woods, because sometimes you feel stupid and irritated and forget to appreciate the process*”. For another, the metaphor suggested exploration of self more than anything else: “*Learning Spanish is like discovering another person in my internal monologue because each language has different tools for expressing wants, needs, and emotions*”. Thus, the concept of journey and exploration are used in a variety of ways but *length* was a key concept in four out of the five.

#### **4.1.6 Cooking/Drinking (N=4)**

These 4 metaphors see language learning as primarily an action to be taken. Two first two participants metaphorized language learning as baking, discussing the various small things that need to be done correctly in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome: “*Learning language Russian is like baking because there’s lots of small parts that are easy to mess up if one is wrong but it’s also very flexible in word positioning unlike English and French*”. Both prioritized the complicated nature of language learning and thus the need to slow down, have patience, and make sure all the small things are taken care of so the big picture can succeed. The other two focused on the difficult nature of actions at times: *drinking hot coffee* and *drinking out of a firehouse*. This suggests concern that learning a MFL can be overwhelming. While true, it is not without hope as the coffee metaphor continues: “*it is difficult but rewarding*”.

#### **4.1.7 Construction Work (N=3)**

These three metaphors all suggest a connection between language and structure. For one, having the right structure or components necessary to create segments of language is essential,

even if it requires a lot of perseverance to get there: *“Learning Russian is like building a house, because once you realize that something isn’t right, you gotta go back to the drawing board”*. For another, the need to have a solid foundation is critical to the continued stability and success of the language learning process: *Learning Chinese is like building a pyramid out of cards, because if you want to get further(taller) you need to widen the base (simple grammar)*. Finally, the third perceives language learning as connecting many separate parts to make a whole: *Learning Chinese is like building legos, because you learn each component and how to use it and put them together to make a complete thought*. Overall, all three participants perceived language learning to be largely structural in nature and, like others in this study, requiring hard work and perseverance.

#### **4.1.8 Communication Bridge (N=3)**

Different from the rest, these three participants perceived language learning to be primarily a bridge of communication between one entity and another. For one, who seems to have formerly known some of the MFL, language learning is perceived to be a joyous time of reconnection: *“Learning Spanish is like catching up with an old friend because even if you forgot some of the details with time, it doesn't take long to remember what you used to know”*. For another, the connection is primarily centered on the cultural aspects of language learning, which many of the participants have not mentioned: *“Learning language is like reconnecting with a familiar culture, because the cultural values and way of life is represented within the language”*. For the last, in quite a clever metaphor, language learning is primarily seen as a means of sophistication: *“Learning Italian is like giving a redneck a macaroon because it makes you feel fancy learning a romantic language and it makes you feel smart and well cultured”*. Here, language learning is seen as a means to an end rather than a skill in and of itself.

#### **4.1.9 Entertainment (N=3)**

Also different from many of the other metaphors, these three focused on the captivating and joyful aspects of language learning, perceiving it as primarily a source of entertainment. For one, language learning was addictive in nature, like a *good TV series*: “*Because once you start it is near impossible to stop; you understand more and more and become more and more curious*”. The flow of language learning was also highlighted by another: “*Learning Italian is like dancing because the language flows smoothly and while abstract is easy to understand*” which is certainly a different perspective from the metaphor groups that took a more analytical approach to language learning such as construction work and problem solving. The last participant in this group metaphorized language learning as a *roller coaster* which indicated their acknowledgement of the ups and downs of language learning even if the overall experience is enjoyable: “*Learning Spanish is like a roller coaster because there are highs and lows and it can be scary*”. Here it is important to note that many more of the metaphors focused on the difficult and frustrating aspects of language learning rather than the more uplifting aspects such as communication and entertainment.

#### **4.1.10 Other (N=3)**

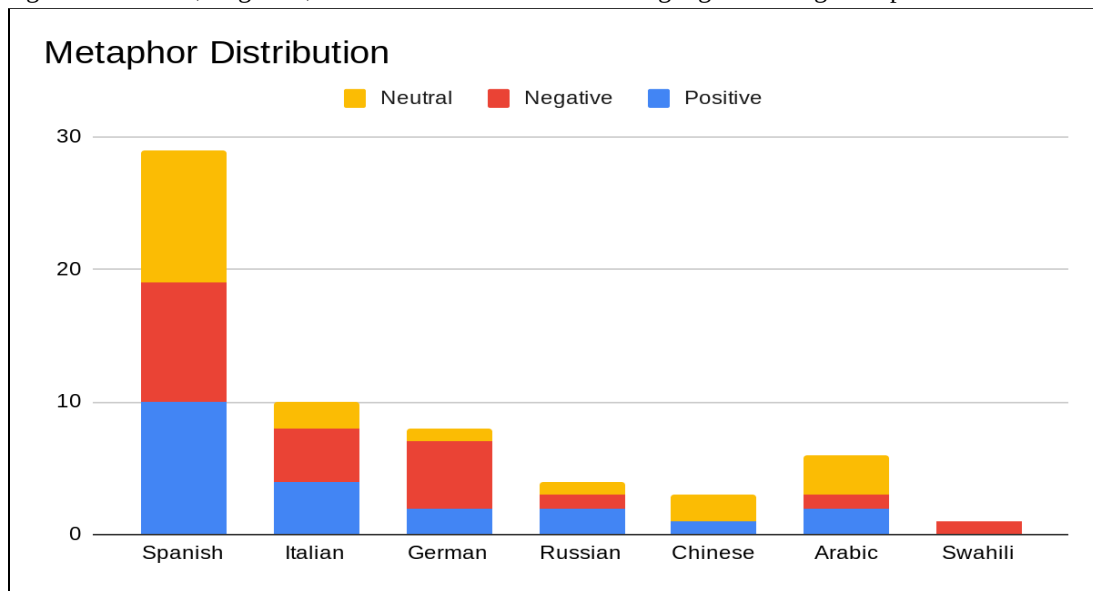
This last category constitutes all conceptual groups with two metaphors or less, the groups being: PROCESS, DISORIENTATION, and RELAXATION. For two, language learning was perceived primarily as a process such as *physical therapy* and *oiling (a machine)* indicating longevity and patience needed to complete the process. For another language learning was perceived as confusing, a disorienting of a previously stable state: “*Learning Swahili is like waking up after passing out because your brain is swimming but trying to figure out what is happening*”. Finally, this last participant perceived language learning primarily as relaxing: “[*Learning*] *Arabic*

is like taking a bath”, quite different from many of the other conceptual groups, and perhaps a good note on which to end this section.

#### 4.1.11 Metaphor Distribution

Also interesting to note is the positive, negative, and neutral metaphor distribution among the various languages. In the table below, one can see that Spanish, being the largest language represented by far, remains about equal in all three aspects. German has the largest percentage of negative metaphors while Russian enjoys more positive metaphors relative to neutral and negative. Italian has fewer neutral metaphors but an equal balance between negative and positive. Finally Arabic and Chinese have more neutral metaphors than any other language. Thus, it seems, by percentage levels, German is the language that causes the most negative metaphors but it’s difficult to say if that would hold true with a larger population sample.

Figure 2: Positive, Negative, and Neutral Distribution of Language Learning Metaphors

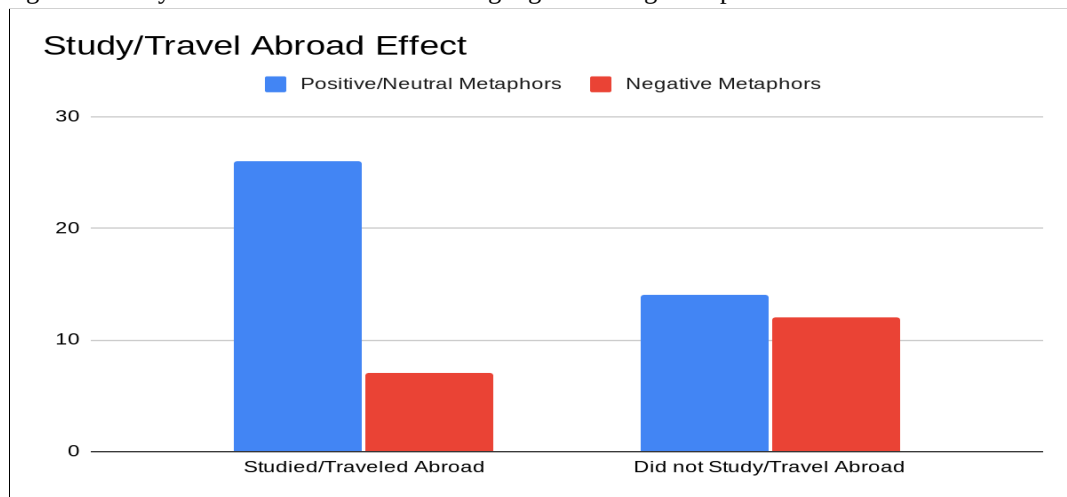


#### 4.1.12 Study Abroad Effect

As one can see from the figure below, studying or traveling abroad seems to generate a much higher percentage of positive and neutral metaphors. For those that did go abroad, twenty-six

of the metaphors generated about the language learning process were positive or neutral while only seven were negative. The group that did not go abroad, however, was more even in their distribution of positive/neutral metaphors to negative ones: fourteen to twelve. Thus it seems that studying or traveling abroad creates more positive perceptions of the language learning process. Most of the participants that went abroad mentioned their enjoyment of the trip and how total immersion in the culture and language was incredibly beneficial in increasing their proficiency. Therefore, study or travel abroad should be highly encouraged.

Figure 3: Study/Travel Abroad Effect on Language Learning Metaphors



## 4.2 Language Teacher Metaphors

For the metaphors concerning language teachers (N=57), there are seven conceptual categories with an eighth category containing all conceptual categories with two or less metaphors. Here, mostly positive metaphors are seen, viewing teachers as NURTURERS, PROVIDERS, COACHES, etc. with only a few mentioning more negative aspects of language teachers such as TWO-SIDED (essentially, the uncertainty surrounding whether or not the teacher will be good or bad) and a few others. As with the language learning metaphors, all the conceptual categories will be discussed by means of example metaphors in order to highlight the differences between them.

Table 3: Conceptual Categories of Language Teacher Metaphors

<b>Conceptual Category</b>	<b>N=</b>	<b>Example Metaphor (A language teacher is like...)</b>	<b>Entailments (Because...)</b>
1. Nurturer	10	Parent; Grandmother; Angel	<i>Walks you patiently through learning and wants to encourage you.</i>
2. Provider	9	Map; Compass; Crutch; Beat; Puzzle Box; Wheel/Brake; Light	<i>A map because they help you get to where you want to be.</i>
3. Coach	7	Coach; Swimming Instructor; Dolphin	<i>A coach because they make you "practice" for the game (conversation with native speaker) in hopes that you are prepared.</i>
4. Cultural Transmitter	6	Tour Guide; Family member; Ambassador; Superwoman	<i>A tour guide because they help you to immerse yourself fully into the best parts of the culture.</i>
5. Guide	5	Tour Guide; Sherpa	<i>A museum tour guide because you need one to really understand the material</i>
6. Helper	4	Friend	<i>A friend, because we are able to make personal connections through learning the language.</i>
7. Two-Sided	4	Moon phases; Roulette; Peach; Pet	<i>A peach because you could get a really great sweet one or you could get a hard and sour one that ruins the experience.</i>
8. Other (Facilitator; Authority; Calm; Instructor; Agent of Change)	12	Friend; Supervisor; Ocean; Kindergarten Teacher; Mother	<i>The ocean because they're constant and steady paced.</i>

#### **4.2.1 Nurturer (N=10)**

Most of the participants in this group perceived a language teacher to be similar to a parent, particularly describing how the teacher is supportive, caring, and patient as they learn the language. For example, one participant wrote: *“A language teacher is like a parent, walks you patiently through learning and wants to encourage you”*. Here the parental characteristics of encouragement and guidance are clear. The teachers are seen as pouring into the students, nurturing them as they go through the language learning process. Interestingly, one participant focused on the sometimes overwhelming nature of nourishment: *“A language teacher is like a grandmother, because even when you are still digesting a meal, grandma will always put more on your plate”*. For this participant, a language teacher functions best when they know when to pour into a student and when to pull back and let the student “digest” their meal. Overall, though, the participants were positive in their metaphors.

#### **4.2.2 Provider (N=9)**

In this conceptual category, language teachers were primarily perceived as ‘tools’ or ‘providers’ in the sense that they became a map, compass, or whatever else the participants needed in order to succeed in learning the language. For example, *“A language teacher is like a map, because I don't know all of the information I need to navigate the language I am learning, but they show me the way”*. Other metaphors include additional tools such as a crutch, beat, puzzle box, wheel/brake, and a light. By utilizing inanimate objects to describe language teachers, the quality of the information and direction teachers provide is central to these participants’ understanding of an effective language teacher rather than the more emotional and relations aspects as indicated by many other participants in this study. For example, in this metaphor: *“A language teacher is a glaring light because they illuminate previously dark environments”*, the focus is on the ability, not



the emotion. Thus, competence is just an essential a factor in language teaching as emotional relatability.

#### **4.2.3 Coach (N=7)**

Coaches are often seen as more co-operative in their leadership style, guiding and correcting students rather than controlling them as one participant illustrates in their metaphor: “*A language teacher is like a coach, because they help you improve by speaking with you and also correcting mistakes in writing. You learn the right and wrong ways to do things until it becomes natural*”. In tandem with this is the idea of the coach slowly increasing the students’ autonomy as another metaphor illustrates: “*A dolphin, they push you to swim like dolphins do with their noses at resorts for tourists, then swim next to you like the way dolphins follow a boat, and then leave you to swim in your own when it is time for you to explore and make your own adventure*”. Thus, these metaphors about language teachers lie in parallel with those that see language learning as gaining a new skill with a focus on slowly increasing the autonomy of the student through practice, correction, and guidance.

#### **4.2.4 Cultural Transmitter (N=6)**

In this conceptual group, a language teacher is primarily perceived as a point of cultural transfer. Often here the metaphors refer to the teacher as a tour guide: “*A language teacher is like a tour guide because they help you to immerse yourself fully into the best parts of the culture*”. However, other metaphors such as ambassador: “*A language teacher is an ambassador for all of the people who speak the language*” and superwoman: “*Because she includes feminism in all discussions of Spanish language and literature*” appeared as well. For these participants, the most effective thing a language teacher can do is be a conduit through which the culture (or whatever the student deems most important such as feminism) flows.

#### **4.2.5 Guide (N=5)**

Although most of the metaphors in this group also use *tour guide*, the entailments suggest a different meaning which places them in this category of GUIDE instead of CULTURAL TRANSMITTER. Here the participants focus on the ability of the teacher to explain the material and ‘show the way’ versus being a cultural conduit; at times a subtle distinction but there nonetheless. So a typical example of a metaphor in this group would be: “*A language teacher is like a tour guide, because they are showing you how to use something that you have no prior knowledge about*”. Another interesting metaphor is one involving the *Sherpa* guides of Mt. Everest: “*A language teacher is like a Sherpa because learning languages is very hard but they help you the whole way through and guide you into your new skill*”. While this metaphor is complex and could be potentially placed in several different conceptual categories, the overarching meaning is that of a guide showing the student where to go and what to do so that they can be successful.

#### **4.2.6 Helper (N=4)**

This category consists of participants who primarily value the qualities of connection and encouragement, those displayed often in friends as they help each other: “*A language teacher is like a teacher and a friend, because we are able to make personal connections through learning the language*”. Here the balance of power in the classroom is more level as the student primarily sees the teacher as an encourager in their own language learning process rather than an imparter of knowledge or instructor of skills as this participant simply puts it: “*A friend, they want you to succeed*”. In all, these metaphors reflect an entirely positive, equal relationship between the student and language teacher.

#### **4.2.7 Two-Sided (N=4)**

Contrary to many of the metaphors seen thus far, this conceptual category takes a more negative view of language teachers. Specifically, participants contend with the idea that the relationship with the teacher is not always steady, it goes up and down. As one metaphor states: “*A language teacher is like the moon phases because my relationship with them waxes and wanes*”. Other participants recognized that not all language teachers are effective and, because language learning involves many classes, the reality exists of experiencing both kinds of teachers. For example: “*A language teacher is like a peach because you could get a really great sweet one or you could get a hard and sour one that ruins the experience*”. A final participant saw a language teacher as confusing: “*A language teacher is like a household dog, because sometimes I can understand what they want me to do but sometimes I have no clue what they’re saying*”. In sum, while still hoping for effective language teachers, these participants suggested that reality can be quite far from ideal.

#### **4.2.8 Other (N=12)**

This final category consists of all conceptual categories that had two or less metaphors. There were quite a few: FACILITATOR, AUTHORITY, CALM, INSTRUCTOR, AGENT OF CHANGE, EXTRACTOR, and DESTROYER. As one can see, the implications of each category swing widely from positive to negative with metaphors about the calmness of language teachers: “*A language teacher is like the ocean because they’re constant and steady paced*” to a very negative metaphor portraying a language teacher as primarily the *Antichrist* because: “*They move too fast and grade too hard*”. The conceptual category of AUTHORITY harkens to the traditional hierarchical power of the classroom: “*A language teacher is like a mom, because she’s there to help and guide you but also be stern when needed*”. In all, these are certainly varied

perceptions of language teachers, yet generally positive, suggesting that while participants may focus on different facets of the complex nature of a language teacher, they accept them as beneficial.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 How do learners of modern foreign languages in tertiary education in the United States describe the language learning process through metaphor?

Participants in this study use similar metaphors to other studies such as LEARNING NEW SKILLS, EXPLORATION, CONSTRUCTION WORK, PROBLEM SOLVING, and ENTERTAINMENT which are reflective of universal core aspects of language learning (Fang, 2015; Farjami, 2012). One such aspect is that of *work*. Over half of the participants (55%), to at least some extent, discussed the difficulty, and thus the amount of hard work involved, in learning a language. In fact, only one learner described language learning as relaxing. Similar percentage levels appeared in Fang's study, suggesting that *work* is a key word ingrained in many students' description of language learning (2015). However, that does not always mean that the student is demotivated. In both Fang's and Farjami's studies, the students still had high motivation levels because they believed the work would eventually lead to a reward and so it did not suppress motivation as much as it became the catalyst for continued motivation (2015; 2012). In this study, the results are more mixed. Some indeed believed continued practice or work made language learning easier and more exciting, but for others notes of despair were heard such as "endless puzzle" or "Sisyphus" and even up to "torture". Indeed, the percentage of demotivated students in this study was a much higher 16% compared to Fang's 5% (2015). It is important to note, however, that Fang's study was of EFL learners and English is considered to be of instrumentally high value which may account for the higher levels of motivation.

Another important word that the learners used to describe the language learning process is *skill*. Almost half of the participants (44%) utilized or implied the development of a certain skill in their metaphorization of learning a foreign language. A lot of the ‘skill’ metaphors revolved around “driving”, “swimming”, “running”, “dancing”, and “solving puzzles”. This indicates that they experience language learning as a set of rules to follow and master. If the vocabulary can be memorized and the grammar patterns learned, then the skill is mastered. Thus, language learning becomes highly compartmentalized and the value of integration, particularly of culture with phonology and syntax, becomes lost. It reduces language learning to units that are loosely tied together and forgets the adage that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. This lies in contrast to Farjami’s study, wherein EXPLORATION and JOURNEY were much larger groups of metaphors, suggesting a more cumulative view of language learning, focused more on what lies between points A and B instead of striving to reach B as quickly as possible (2012). The larger percentage of participants in this study who utilized skill acquisition metaphors over journey metaphors may suggest a student population with a more compartmentalized, and less integrated, view of language learning.

Also, the positive, negative, and neutral metaphor distribution shows that the language learning process is neither unanimously hated or loved, regardless of the language. This is interesting, because languages such as Arabic and Chinese have been shown to be more difficult languages to learn for native English speakers than languages such as Spanish and Italian (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). It might lead one to think, therefore, that they should have more negative metaphors, proportionally, but they do not. Thus, it seems that different students react differently to the language learning process, which supports Chamber’s (1993) conclusions that

students vary in what they like and dislike and so solving demotivation issues is less about implementing rules but rather opening lines of communication and cooperation with students.

## **5.2 How do learners of modern foreign languages in tertiary education in the United States describe the teachers' role through metaphor?**

As only 5 or 9% of the metaphors related to language teachers were negative, it seems that the learners in this study were generally satisfied with the role of their teachers in the language learning process. This is good news because teachers can be a large source of demotivation if the learners perceive something to be wrong with their attitude, competence, commitment, and/or teaching style/method (Dörnyei, 2009; Tang and Baldauf, 2007). In this study, the opposite seemed to be true, with many considering their teachers to be supportive, kind, nurturing, friendly, and overall a source of encouragement for the students. This suggests that the role of the teacher in the eyes of the learner has evolved from the traditional dominantly authoritative role. It seems that the learners prefer a cooperative teaching style supplemented with lots of support and encouragement, echoing the results of a study by Wan et al. on EFL teacher roles in China (2011).

Many of the metaphor entailments suggested that the learners preferred a more cooperative teaching style because they felt as if they were having to re-learn so many things (grammar, pronunciation, etc.) when starting a modern foreign language, and so they are transported back to their early days of school where so much support and encouragement is needed, and in fact, critical. Thus, because they feel as if they are beginning anew, they need additional, scaffolded levels of support that are not as necessary in their other classes. Such support should not curtail their developing autonomy but like a *parent* or *coach* or *guide* (terms used in many of the

metaphors), should be used appropriately and less so as the learner develops in their chosen language (Littlejohn, 2008).

### **5.3 What are the factors influencing demotivation in learners of modern foreign languages in tertiary education in the United States?**

In the literature, one of the main reasons for demotivation among students is the relationship of the students with the teacher (Dörnyei, 2009; Tang and Baldauf, 2007). In this study, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, the metaphors regarding language teachers in this study were overwhelmingly positive. The cooperative style of teaching seems to work well with the students, with only a handful of negative metaphors bemoaning a potentially confusing or ineffective and difficult teacher that could ruin the process of learning. Metaphors such as these do indicate the power of the teacher to bless or curse the language learning process for the student and so teachers should be aware of this. In fact, as a continued guard against demotivation, occasional check-ins with the learners regarding the effectiveness of the teaching style would be beneficial. A bad teacher-student relationship can easily cause demotivation, but a good relationship that is well-maintained can be a huge deterrent.

Even in a good student-teacher relationship, however, the language that the teacher uses with the student is important. One factor of demotivation in this study revealed itself in the process vs. product-oriented metaphors. During the metaphor analysis, the author discovered that some participants were describing the language learning process in a consumerist manner, as a product to be obtained, while others focused on language learning as a process or journey. Frustration can occur when a learner, having only the product in mind, is deterred by the process. As a salient example, one participant wrote: “[*Learning a language is like*] an endless puzzle; you’re adding



*more pieces and a picture's starting to show more clearly, but it's never fully there*". A good counter to such demotivation can be found in emphasizing metaphors that are process-oriented, for instance, metaphors such as "*[Learning a language is like] learning how to ride a bike, it takes practice to get better, but if you keep going you'll excel*" suggests a realization that language learning does not happen overnight, nor is instant success guaranteed. In fact, language learning is difficult and does indeed require much work and practice. Process-oriented metaphors such as these align more closely with the reality of second (or foreign) language acquisition than product-oriented metaphors because there are stages to learning and, according to the Critical Period Hypothesis, learners of new languages beginning in tertiary education have almost no chance of reaching native-like proficiency (Cook, 2016; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2009). Thus, teachers should be encouraged to utilize more process-oriented language and metaphors when discussing language learning in the classroom as it might "help learners make personal sense of their effort and help them see a rationale for it" (Farjami, 2012, p. 103).

Even so, when utilizing process-oriented metaphors, teachers should use metaphors in conceptual categories such as JOURNEY or EXPLORATION over SKILLS or PROBLEM SOLVING because it allows for a more cumulative and holistic view of the language learning process. Such a view should be encouraged because language is indeed more than just vocab and grammar, and intercultural competence is just as important an area to develop as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Emitt & Komesaroff, 2003; Schmidt, 2000). When teachers help students to understand that language learning is a process of many years, and continually reminds them to focus more on the lessons learned in the journey rather than quickly reaching the end goal, then the difficult nature of language learning might not be so overwhelming.

Another common demotivating factor discussed in the literature is outdated or irrelevant pedagogy (Falout et al., 2009). In this study, this was also not seen as an underlying factor influencing demotivation. In fact, only one participant complained about homework. Thus, it does not seem that the pedagogical methods implemented by the institution are any main cause of demotivation and in fact, several participants wrote positive metaphors about how the language learning process allows them to (re)connect with the culture of the language and how the teachers act as guides, showcasing the beauty of the language.

External to the classroom, factors of demotivation include the subversion of modern foreign languages under the global hegemony of the English language. Based on anecdotal experience, the author thought that this factor would by far be one of the largest demotivators, but it does not seem to be so. In none of the participants' metaphors did the sense that the language was not worth learning show itself. In fact, one participant commented that learning Italian was like *giving a redneck a macaroon* because it brought a sense of sophistication and culture. For a few others, probably heritage learners, learning the language brought with it a reconnection to lost cultures and family members. However, the overall lack of discussion surrounding the value of the language in the language learning process suggests that it is not a source of either motivation or demotivation and that other factors weigh more heavily on the students' minds.

In fact, the largest underlying factors of demotivation seem to be the endless nature of the language learning process and the amount of hard work required. The metaphor analysis revealed several conceptual categories that required participants to be active in the language learning process, which of course requires work. No matter the initial motivation levels, endless hours of hard work can dampen any spirit. Therefore, as a way to counter the demotive and remotivate the students, it may be beneficial for teachers to set numerous short-term, achievable goals which

allows them to feel successful. Such success creates its own motivation and thus a healthier cycle is born. For example, this is where task-supported or task-based language teaching could be of particular value. One could think of it, metaphorically, as adding a few more rest stops along the highway of language learning.

In this vein, a teacher can also introduce students to various self-motivation (or remotivation) strategies which would allow the learner to develop more autonomy in the language learning process and reduce the burden on the teacher to constantly motivate students. For instance, Ushioda suggests four main ways or strategies: paying attention to incentives, adopting goal-oriented self-regulation, finding ways to get temporary relief, and communicating with others about learning difficulties or motivation problems (2001). Doing this will allow both the teacher and student to open more lines of communication (instead of the student suffering in silence) and allow the student to take charge of their own learning and recognize that when the process becomes overwhelming, they need to stop and reevaluate what factors are negatively affecting their motivation and what they can do to counteract them and remotivate themselves. If this can be achieved then, while the hard work may not disappear (for such is the nature of language learning), the negative forces surrounding the work can certainly be reduced, allowing motivation to surge forward once more.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Motivation is of critical importance in the language learning process. As Wang and Littlewood note on Dörnyei and Csizér, “Without enough motivation, even students with the most outstanding capabilities cannot reach long-term objectives; neither are suitable curricula and good teaching sufficient to guarantee students’ achievement” (2005; 1998). While not every motivated student is successful, true long-term success cannot occur without motivation. Therefore, it is important not only to find ways to increase motivation in students but also to counter demotivation when and where it occurs. If the dampening force can be identified, then it can be counteracted and removed, allowing the suppressed motivation to spring forward. This study is important because it tries to do exactly that. By using metaphor elicitation, the author was able to determine how tertiary students of modern foreign languages in the United States describe the language learning process and the teachers’ role in the process, thereby uncovering potential points of demotivation, particularly the notes of despair felt at the difficult and endless nature of the process as well as process vs. product-oriented metaphors, and suggesting counteractants as potential solutions. By employing these strategies, teachers can be an active force in countering and removing the demotives, allowing remotivation to occur. When this happens, successful and long-lasting language learning flourishes.

While this study unearthed some useful insights, there were, of course, limitations. Increasing the sample size, particularly in regard to a more even distribution of different modern

foreign languages, would allow the researcher to tease out even more nuances and investigate any potentially important differences between the languages. Sampling students from different universities as well as those that had dropped out of or quit taking modern foreign languages would also increase the validity of the study because it would provide a more honest and cumulative reflection of the relationship between learner and language learning motivation. Third, as an additional reliability check, it would be beneficial to have a colleague with which to discuss the conceptual codification of the metaphors as metaphor analysis tends to be subjective in nature. Unfortunately, the author was unable to do so in this study. Finally, analyzing demotivation by proficiency level as well would give a deeper understanding as to how motivation fluctuates over time and the best strategies to employ at the various levels.

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## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX A

### LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) What would you consider to be your first, or native, language?
- 2) What is the current language(s) you are studying?
- 3) What level class are you currently taking? (E.g. 1xx, 2xx, 3xx, etc.)
- 4) Would you rate yourself at the beginning, intermediate, or advanced level of said language(s)?
- 5) Have you ever studied any other languages? If so, which ones and for how long?
- 6) Have you ever traveled/studied abroad before? If so, how was the experience?

Please describe your experience learning the language(s) you are **currently** studying using a **metaphor** based on the following prompt:

- 1) Learning language (X) is (like) \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.

Please describe your experience with language teachers using a **metaphor** based on the following prompt:

- 1) A language teacher is (like) \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.

## VITA

Born in Oxford, Mississippi in 1997, Holly Sallah graduated from High School as Valedictorian in 2015 and started the University of Mississippi that fall. In 2019, she finished *summa cum laude* with two Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and International Studies. In 2020 and 2021, she taught High School Spanish and Humanities at Regents School of Oxford. In 2021 she returned to academia, entering the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi.