

# THE MOTIVATION PROCESSES OF MA IN ENGLISH APPLIED LINGUISTICS STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Research into L2 motivation has more than five decades of tradition. Despite the copious data, information about the motivation processes of MA students is still very sparse. Therefore, the aim of this article is (1) to explore the characteristics of the general motivation of English MA students and (2) to examine the phenomenon as a dynamically changing construct. It is a small-scale qualitative exploratory study involving six English Applied Linguistics MA students: two first-year and two second-year students and two graduates. In order to investigate the motivation of these students semi-structured interviews were administered. The results suggest that the motivation of the participating students is a highly complex phenomenon compounded of several different elements and that the interaction of these elements can be examined on two levels; namely, the motivation process on a daily basis and the motivation process over a number of years.

**Keywords:** motivation, process model, EFL, applied linguistics MA, dynamic system

## 1 Introduction

Achieving a high level of proficiency in one or more foreign languages is one of the highest priorities in today's education since with the fast-paced globalization foreign language proficiency has gradually become more and more important in every area of modern life. For instance, nowadays the ability to speak English is a necessary requirement in most workplaces and it also functions as one of the most prevalent languages of international communication. One of the consequences of English having become so important is that it has also become a major object of language studies at all levels and of research. Besides learning it as a foreign language at school, students also have the opportunity to continue their language studies in higher education and they have the opportunity to choose the English language as their research area.

With regard to tertiary education in Hungary, the reputation of English studies has gone through major changes during the past four decades. While in the 1970s it was one of the most respected and appreciated university tracks in the eyes of the Hungarian society, it appears that since the introduction of the Bologna system in 2005, it is no longer very prestigious to learn English for its own sake (Komlósi, 2012). According to previous research (Abády Nagy, 2009; Komlósi, 2012), this loss of prestige can be explained by the changes in the Hungarian higher education affecting the structure of English Studies. Abády Nagy (2009) claims that condensing the traditional four-year (i.e., 'college programme') curriculum into a

three-year programme caused major damage to the perceived value of the qualification earned by a degree in English Studies even if the training of students remained at a high level. For example, in contrast with the degrees obtained in the previous tertiary education system, undergraduate English degrees of the Bologna system do not provide job-specific qualifications for the students, thus leaving the value of a BA in English degree questionable for the society and the professional world (Abády Nagy, 2009).

As Komlósi (2012) explains, one of the most important roles of the BA programme is to prepare those students for the MA programme who are interested in furthering their education. Within most MA in English programmes, students can choose from several tracks, such as Literature, Cultural Studies, Theoretical Linguistics and Applied Linguistics (“Outline of the Programme,” SEAS). Even though the question of the usefulness and applicability of these tracks arises constantly, ample numbers of students seem to choose to enrol in an English MA programme, as between 2009-2012 overall 980 students applied to an English MA programme in Hungary, and 298 of them were admitted (Komlósi, 2012). Taking into consideration the negative societal judgement of the abovementioned degree and the lack of job opportunities associated with it, the question arises: what motivates these students to opt for an MA in English degree?

Although it is one of the prominent research areas of applied linguistics (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015), most studies of motivation seem to focus primarily on the language learning motivation of elementary school, secondary school, and college students (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Kormos, Csizér, Menyhárt & Török, 2008; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Ushioda, 2001). Throughout the more than five decades of research, the motivation processes of MA students have not yet been extensively researched. Because these students choose a foreign language not only for the purpose of mastering it but also as their focus of research, studying their general motivation and investigating how it changes during MA studies could (1) provide a deeper insight into the reasons behind the popularity of this programme, (2) help teachers to support their students in the pursuit of their goals more effectively, and (3) contribute the debate about the utility of MA in English Studies.

Taking the research niche into consideration, the current study aims to explore the general motivation of students of the MA in English programme at a major Hungarian university, specializing in English Applied Linguistics (henceforth, AL-MA students). As, despite the merits of the approach, empirical research on motivation from a dynamic systems perspective is still very sparse (Dörnyei, MacIntyre & Henry, 2015), this study investigates the proposed issue by treating motivation as a constantly fluctuating and dynamically changing construct.

The article starts with some details on the background to the research. This section provides a theoretical overview of the relevant motivation studies, focusing on Gardner’s social psychological approach (1985), Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998) process model of L2 motivation, Schuman’s neurobiological model (1998), and Ushioda’s (2009) person in context relational view. The methodological issues of data collection and data analysis in the current study are discussed in the following section. Then the analysis of the interviews collected from the English Applied Linguistics MA students and the relationship of these results with the findings of previous studies are discussed. In the conclusion the results are highlighted, and some limitations of the study and possible directions for further research are presented.

## 2 Background to the research

There is little doubt that motivation is one of the most complex topics in the field of SLA. Despite a tradition of motivation research that reaches back more than five decades, no single theory has managed to give an extensive and thorough description of all the aspects of motivation. It is a multi-faceted phenomenon so it is almost impossible to give a single comprehensive definition. However, most researchers seem to agree that motivation “concerns the direction and magnitude of human behaviour, that is, the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 4).

Within the field of motivation research there are several approaches, each of which defines motivation in a slightly different way. For instance, the fact that Gardner defines motivation as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (1985, p. 10) suggests that early studies handle the phenomenon as a static one. In Gardner’s (1985) model language learning is not a socially neutral field. The notion of integrative and instrumental orientation also becomes important but only as an “antecedent” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 123) of motivation. In other words, setting the goal serves as a driving force and can have both personal (i.e., integrative) and practical (i.e., instrumental) characteristics.

The concept of integrativeness can also be detected implicitly in Schuman’s (1998) neurobiological model, in which one of the five dimensions is the ‘self and social image’. According to this notion, it is important whether “the event is compatible with the social norms and the individuals’ self-concept” (as cited in Dörnyei, 1998, p. 127). For example, if one would like his degree to be appreciated by others (i.e., integrate it into the values of society) people’s judgement about the actual usefulness of the particular degree serve as the social norms. If people accept the value of the degree, the self image can integrate smoothly into the community/society. If people do not accept the value and the usefulness of the degree, the self image may suffer and deteriorate due to the incompatibility between the self and the social image.

As, however, motivation is connected to human behaviour, later studies started to treat it as a dynamically changing construct. Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998) process model of L2 motivation is one of the most influential dynamic models. The authors distinguish between three stages of the motivation process: the pre-actional, actional, and post-actional phases. The model analyses motivation as it happens in real time and accounts for the constant shifts and changes during the process. The pre-actional phase (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998) contains “goal setting,” “intention formation” and “initiation of intention enactment” and is influenced by the learners’ initial hopes, desires, expectations and resources. The actional phase (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998) refers to the actual execution of the necessary action and its outcomes, which are influenced by appraisal and action control. Post-actional phase (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998), as the last stage of the process, enables the learner to critically evaluate and reflect on the process. These phases occur cyclically and repeatedly during the L2 learning process (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998).

Similarly, Ushioda (2009) discusses motivation as a dynamically changing phenomenon with micro- and macro-level contexts. In her approach, the person is viewed as a real human being with his or her own identity and past experiences, which are also interconnected with the social situations. Human behaviours are constantly changing, thus motivation can be best viewed as a dynamically evolving process, which – regarding the

factor of *time* – has a micro-level (e.g., a couple of seconds) and a macro-level (e.g., months and years) following the dynamic systems theory (Dörnyei, MacIntyre & Henry, 2015)

Within the framework of this paper, based on the definitions presented above, motivation is defined as a dynamically changing process following Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) definition. According to them, motivation is “the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised, and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out” (1998, p. 64).

Despite the vast number of studies in the field, it appears that motivation research has paid little attention to the general motivation of college and university students. On the contrary, it has been primarily concerned with their L2 motivation, and it usually disregards the aspects of their general motivation. For instance, the study of Kormos, Kontra, and Csölle (2002) similarly to that of Kormos, Csizér, Menyhárt, and Török (2008) researches the L2 motivation and the language wants of English major BA students and briefly also discusses how English major students in Hungary are able to find a job with their degree and what they are using their language knowledge for, but neither of these studies describes the changes in students' motivation during the different phases of the BA programme. Furthermore, in one of the most recent studies on the topic, Piniel and Csizér (2014) investigated the motivation of English major BA students enrolled into an academic writing class for half a year, providing a detailed examination of their L2 motivation. However, their research does not touch upon the possible reasons behind the students' choice of the BA in English programme.

As the available research shows, the motivation of students in the English MA programme has not been extensively researched in the Hungarian context yet. Yet, this is in fact a relevant research topic because of the declining value of holding a degree in English Studies both at BA and MA level (for a more detailed discussion, see *Introduction*). Investigating the motivation of MA in English students could be particularly interesting because according to Kormos et al. (2002), most students of BA English Studies would like to work as language teachers or translators. As the BA degree does not provide qualifications for these jobs, choosing to continue their studies at MA level seems to be a logical decision. However, holding an MA in English degree without teaching qualifications does not necessarily provide the graduated students with more job opportunities either. That is, in Hungary almost the same type of jobs can be applied for with a BA in English as with an MA in English (without teaching qualifications) degree (cf. [www.profession.hu](http://www.profession.hu), [www.monster.hu](http://www.monster.hu), [www.workania.hu](http://www.workania.hu), etc.). The English Applied Linguistics (AL) MA track is the closest to an MA degree in English with teaching qualifications because the research conducted in AL is intended to help and improve pedagogy and there is common ground between these two academic fields and types of degree. Yet it is not easy to find a job as a teacher with an AL-MA degree. In Hungary, secondary schools and language schools can only officially employ people who hold a degree with teaching qualifications. A BA degree is also sufficient for the remaining office and administrative jobs, as well. Still, there are a handful of students every year who choose an MA in English track even if they are more or less aware of the lack of job opportunities they are going to face (Komlósi, 2012).

Therefore, in order to investigate this intricate issue, the present paper attempts to study the general motivation processes of MA in English Applied Linguistics students in the Hungarian context, with the aim of finding answers to the following research questions:

1. What major aspects characterize the motivation of MA in English Applied Linguistics students during their training?
2. How does the motivation of MA in English Applied Linguistics students change during their training?

### 3 Methods

The current investigation is a small scale qualitative exploratory study whose aim is to investigate the motivation of English Applied Linguistics MA students who study in the Hungarian context, focusing on (1) the major aspects characterizing the motivation of AL students in the MA programme (2) the ways their motivation fluctuates and changes during the two years of the MA programme. In order to investigate these issues six MA students of the Department of English Applied Linguistics of a major Hungarian university were chosen to be interviewed in 2014.

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants of the study were: two first-year students, two second-year students and two graduates of the programme. The first- and second-year students were approached by the researchers during their Applied Linguistics classes and asked to volunteer as participants. The MA graduates were chosen through snowball sampling, acquiring their contact information from their former thesis supervisors, and they were contacted by e-mail. In order to maintain their privacy, the participants were given pseudonyms before the data analysis. For data handling convenience, they received pseudonyms starting with the same letter as their real names. Based on the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews the following participant profiles emerged.

Participants						
<b>Name</b>	Anna	Emma	Gyöngyi	Bahman	Judit	Alíz
<b>Age</b>	23	28	23	44	26	26
<b>Native language</b>	Hungarian	Hungarian	Hungarian	Farsi	Hungarian	Hungarian
<b>Has learnt English for</b>	9 years	20 years	20 years	32 years	20 years	20 years
<b>Has also studied</b>	German, French	Italian, French, Latin	German, Finnish, Veps	German, Spanish, Hungarian	French, Russian	German, Italian

Table 1. Participant profiles

As Table 1 shows, the participants were between the ages of 23-44. They were all speakers of Hungarian. Five of them were Hungarians and spoke it as their L1, while one of them who also spoke Hungarian was Persian. They had all studied English for at least nine years but besides Hungarian and English, they were all experienced language learners, also studying several other foreign languages such as German, French and Italian.

#### 3.2 Instrument

For data collection purposes three semi-structured interview protocols were used (see *Appendices*). The interview questions were created based on the models discussed earlier (see Section 2.). We looked at Gardner's (1985) integrative characteristic of motivation and we also treated motivation as a dynamic process by using Schumann's (1998), Ushioda's (2009)

and primarily Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model of L2 motivation. Personal questions about the participants' language learning background (e.g., "When did you start learning English?", "What other foreign languages do you speak besides English?") were also added, and during the interviews, participants were allowed to slightly divert from the topic and add extra information they considered important.

The aim of the interview questions was to gain deeper insight into the motivational elements influencing students' choices, decisions and habits during the different phases of their MA studies, so the three different groups (1st year, 2nd year, and post-graduates) received slightly different interview questions, highlighting the most salient issues of the study phase in which they were. For instance, first year students were mostly asked about the motivating factors behind their choice of the Applied Linguistics track (e.g., "Why did you choose English Applied Linguistics as your MA track?", "What are your expectations in connection with this track?"), whereas former graduates were interviewed about their retrospective views on the programme and about how they benefitted from the skills and factual knowledge acquired during the programme in their current jobs (e.g., "Are the things learnt in the English Applied Linguistics track useful in what you are working on now?"). Being AL-MA students themselves, the researchers created an initial draft for the interview guidelines based on brainstorming about the topic and on the elements of Dörnyei and Ottó's Process model of L2 motivation (1998). As the first step of the validation process, the first draft of the interview schedule was discussed with an expert of the field, and the second draft was improved based on her comments. Then the second draft was piloted with a second-year AL-MA student, and based on her remarks the instrument was finalized. To ensure maximum efficiency of the instrument, during each interview participants were encouraged to add further ideas to the topics discussed.

### **3.3 Data collection**

The data collection was carried out in the autumn semester of 2014, which was the first semester for the first year students and the third semester for the second year students. The participants met the researchers one-by-one for a 30-40 minute audio recorded interview, which was conducted in Hungarian. Even though Bahman is not a Hungarian L1 speaker, he also chose to be interviewed in Hungarian as he had been living in the country for more than 20 years and he felt comfortable using the language. At the beginning of the interview permission was asked for the interviews to be audio recorded and the respondents were ensured that their privacy would not be compromised. First, the participants were asked general questions about their personal data, language learning history, – previous studies and academic experience. Then they received questions about their study habits, goals, plans, and their reasons behind choosing English Applied Linguistics as their MA track. At the end of the interview, the participants were also asked to add any further information they had not been asked about but they might consider relevant.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

As the first step of the data analysis procedure, the audio recorded interview data were transcribed and subjected to content analysis line-by-line. The first two interviews were coded by both of the researchers separately, and then based on the results, a coding system was developed. Then, the coded data were analyzed for emerging themes with the help of the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These emerging themes were labelled and organized into categories according to a coding system developed from Dörnyei

and Ottó's (1998) process model of L2 motivation. By the end of the analysis, the coding system managed to accommodate 17 emerging themes into five major categories.

## 4 Results

The following section provides an overview of the themes and categories that emerged during the data analysis, as well as a summary of the most important findings. During the data analysis altogether 341 relevant individual quotes were coded, and from this data, 17 recurring themes emerged. These emerging themes could be grouped into five main categories, namely 'norms and values', 'environmental support', 'goals and plans', 'self-regulation' and 'expectations'. Table 2 shows the definition and contents of each category.

Category	Label	Emerging themes
Norms and values	personal and societal expectations, values, and general feelings towards something	Internal norms and values
		External norms and values
		Amotivation
Environmental support	external elements influencing one's motivation, and recollections of the effects of these elements	Family
		Peers
		Teachers
		Friends
		Demotivating factors
		Memories
Goals and plans	aspirations and objectives underlying one's choices and the retrospective evaluation of these plans and choices	Goals/plans
		Retrospective evaluation
Self-regulation	coping mechanisms participants applied in order to accomplish their tasks or maintain their motivation	Time management
		Self-regulation
		Learning strategies
		Work
Expectations	initial expectations of the interviewees in connection with their applied linguistics MA studies and their comments about possible improvements to the programme	Expectations
		Remarks about the programme

Table 2. Categories and emerging themes

‘Internal norms and values’ and ‘external norms and values’ were the two emerging themes with the most coded segments, suggesting that students, regardless of their age or the study phase they are in, were highly motivated and influenced not only by their internal set of values but also by their perceptions about the expectations and accepted norms of society. For instance, all the participants mentioned that during the application, the reputation of the university played a considerable role in their choices. Moreover, Emma claimed that even though she had always been very fond of English and wanted to study English linguistics and culture, she was very hesitant because of the societal judgment of humanities students, “The students studying at the faculty of humanities are usually looked down on by many people. Thus, I didn’t want to become one of these students.”

Information regarding the theme of ‘goals’ was also frequently mentioned. This label was allocated to the segments referring to one’s aspirations and plans. For example, “Originally, I wanted to become an English teacher. Then, as I became interested in Applied Linguistics, I changed my plans” (Judit). In connection with their goals and plans, participants were also talking about their initial anticipations in connection with the MA programme, and they were also offering their comments with regard to possible changes in its structure. These pieces of data were labelled ‘expectations’ and ‘remarks about the programme’, respectively. An illustrative example for both themes would be as follows “I expected some classes to be a bit more practice oriented. For example, I think that during the translation class we should have done a bit more practice besides theory” (Alíz).

External factors, like ‘family’, ‘friends’, ‘peers’ and ‘teachers’ were also frequently mentioned by every participant. The transcribed data suggested that these recurring themes also had a notable impact on the students’ motivation, in some cases even preventing them from giving up on their goals.

Sometimes I’m not sure if I am going to be able to find a job with this degree. But my parents are very supportive, and they always say that at least I will have an MA degree which will certainly be an advantage when I’m looking for a job. (Anna)

Most participants mentioned that besides their studies they were also doing some kind of part-time job. Gyöngyi, Emma and Bahman were working as private English teachers. Judit was a part-time volunteer at a museum. Alíz, who was also studying for a BA in Economics BA parallel to her applied linguistics MA studies, was a marketing assistant intern at a large company. The segments referring to the interviewees’ jobs were labelled ‘work’. Responses to the question on how they approach everyday school tasks and how they balance their studies, work, and personal life could be broken down into the following emerging themes: ‘time management’ (i.e., how much time they devoted to each of their tasks), ‘self-regulation’ (i.e., how they kept themselves motivated to do their school tasks when they were already very tired after work) and ‘learning strategies’ (i.e., how they approach their school tasks).

If it’s late in the evening and I feel very tired, I sit down and consider the possible consequences of not doing my tasks for the next day. If it’s already midnight and I still have to read a long article, but I know that there will be no test on it the next day, most probably I won’t read it. (Gyöngyi)

‘Amotivation’ and ‘demotivating factors’ were also emerging themes in the interviews. The label ‘amotivation’ refers to instances when the participants were talking



about feeling a complete lack of motivation in connection with something. For instance, “I have never really cared much about literature” (Emma). On the contrary, ‘demotivating factors’ refers to coded segments where the participants mentioned people or events that were discouraging them from pursuing their goals. Anna, for example, claimed that she almost decided not to apply for the MA programme when her BA thesis, which was written about an applied linguistics topic, did not get very positive feedback from one of her teachers.

In the interviews with the two former graduates, Judit and Alíz, two other emerging themes were also encountered, namely ‘memories’ and ‘retrospective evaluation.’ The emerging theme ‘memories’ contains the parts where the participants were talking about their recollections of their university studies. “I think it was a wonderful experience. By the end of the second year, we became really good friends with my classmates and the classes were also always very enjoyable” (Alíz). ‘Retrospective evaluation’ refers to the comments concerning the interviewees’ opinion about the usefulness of the programme.

All in all, I think I acquired very useful skills that I can apply at work. In spite of the fact that I don’t work as an applied linguist, I draw on my text comprehension skills every day. I may not use the factual knowledge I acquired during my studies, but I use the skills we developed every day. (Judit)

The participants’ answers suggest that their demotivation during the MA programme is the result of society’s negative judgments on students of humanities and the lack of practice-oriented classes offered in the field of humanities. Nevertheless, once students are in the programme, the major aspects characterizing their motivation are the copious emotional support from their family members and friends and the recalling of the useful aspects of majoring in the MA programme by praising the acquired skills and remembering the supportive classmates. Regarding participants’ motivational processes the answers suggest that there is a very difficult starting point that students faced at the beginning of their studies which often demotivates them. Once, however, they are in the programme, their motivation fluctuates and negative experiences are often counterbalanced by positive emotional encouragement from their loved ones.

## 5 Discussion

This part of the paper discusses the results of the data by providing explanations for them. On the basis of the emerging themes, the motivation processes of the participants can be discussed on two different levels namely, a micro- and a macro level. In the study the micro level was interpreted as participants’ moment by moment (i.e., from one class to another) motivation process while the macro level can be interpreted as adding up all the micro levels, which essentially results in the overarching time period of the number of years students spend at the university during the MA programme. All the participants began their studies with a more or less well-defined final goal that they wanted to achieve. Most students mentioned less explicit goals, such as improving their skills and getting a deeper understanding of the language, while obtaining an MA degree at the same time. For example, Bahman was interested in gaining a deeper insight into the English language, and since he already had experience of working as an English teacher, he wanted to get more information about the theoretical background of language learning. In contrast, Alíz seemed to have a clearly defined, very explicit goal, namely that she wanted to become a researcher and investigate the L2 learning of deaf language learners.

These final goals consist of smaller sub-goals, and during the two years of the programme, the participants have to achieve these sub-goals and overcome the emerging tasks and difficulties. Due to these sub-goals and tasks, their motivation processes are cyclical, and with every one of them, they go through the pre-actional, actional, and post-actional phases of the motivation process on a daily basis (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). For instance, in order to get their degrees, they have to successfully meet the requirements of several classes, and in order to do so, they have to invest energy and keep themselves motivated every day. In this way they go through a cycle of goal setting, execution, and retrospection with every task or project.

In contrast, the motivation processes of AL MA students can also be examined on a higher, more abstract level, where the different stages of the programme correspond to the different phases of the process model of L2 motivation (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). From this perspective, the six participants interviewed for this study can be divided into three categories: the first-year students represent the pre-actional phase, the second-year students are the representatives of the actional phase, and the graduates stand for the post-actional phase.

In the interviews with the three groups, the same five categories of emerging themes were encountered ('norms and values', 'environmental support', 'goals and plans', 'self-regulation' and 'expectations'). However, it appears that in each phase of the MA studies, the different categories, especially norms and values, external support and goals, play various roles or manifest themselves in slightly different ways. On the basis of the data gathered, it seems that in the pre-actional phase, norms and values influence students' choice of the educational institution and also their choice of specialization. As already mentioned in the *Results* section, most students acknowledged that their choice of university had been heavily influenced by the reputation of the institution. For instance, Anna said that "I've heard many good things about this university before and I think people consider it to be one of the most prestigious universities in Hungary." When asked about the reason for choosing the applied linguistics track, both Anna and Emma claimed that they wanted to do something with possible real life applications. Moreover, Emma argued that "even though I was also interested in Theoretical Linguistics, I chose Applied Linguistics because it seemed more practical. I think those subjects that are less abstract and more applicable in real life are more appreciated by Hungarian society." The answers of the participants seem to suggest that their initial choices were heavily influenced by their desire to integrate smoothly with Hungarian society by opting for training and a degree which has a high value attached to it by the general public. Similarly to L2 motivation, which can be fuelled by the desire of the language learner to be integrated into the L2 community (Gardner, 1985; Schuman, 1998), the motivation of these MA students appeared to be driven by their aspiration to be acknowledged and accepted by the society they wanted to become a part of.

In contrast, during the actional phase, norms and values seem to have an effect on how students keep themselves on track and motivated for action. In this phase, norms and values appear to influence the reasons lying at the core of every action taken by the participant in order to maintain their movement towards their goals. The internal norms and values seem to become even more highlighted than at the previous stage. For example, the desire to live up to his own expectations and successfully overcome challenges seems to be the most powerful and influential elements that keeps Bahman in action every day and helps him maintain his motivation: "It's very important what I can give from myself to the moments of my learning

process. For me, this is a challenge that I'd like to rise to." According to Bahman's answer, as opposed to the pre-actional phase, in the actional phase when most of the actual work and learning process happens, the driving force behind motivation shifts from the desire to be integrated into a community to living up to one's own expectations and avoiding disfavoured behaviour, which would have a serious effect on group dynamics as well. As it is discussed in *Results* section, MA graduates attempt to recall only their pleasant memories about the programme. One source of good memories is the support from their classmates. Since a class is a group of individuals, it is very important to what extent a student is willing to be part of the learning process which also entails working with others and overcoming challenges together.

Similarly to those from the actional phase, participants representing the post-actional phase claimed that when they felt demotivated, momentarily uninterested, or overwhelmed by the number or the difficulty of their tasks, their internal norms and values prevented them from giving up. For instance, considering giving something up a mistake and an undesirable solution prevented Alíz from terminating her studies, "I just didn't want to give up because so many of my peers gave up and I just didn't want to make the same mistake and take the easy way out."

Besides the group of norms and values, emerging themes concerning environmental support also seem to have a major role in the motivation of AL-MA students in every phase of their studies. During the pre-actional phase, the behaviour of parents and teachers might have almost as much influence on their choice of track as the internal or external norms and values. Emma, for example, almost changed tracks because of her theoretical linguistics teachers, "The teachers giving the Linguistic Theory lectures are simply fascinating. Their classes are professional and of particularly high quality. I was thinking of changing from the Applied Linguistics track because of them." The fact that she still decided to stick to her original track might suggest that the values she attaches to the possible real life applications of Applied Linguistics and the societal judgment she thinks is attached to theoretical subjects have a more pronounced influence on her choices. The fact that she did not change her track despite the fact that she would have been interested in Theoretical Linguistics suggests that she thought that students of theoretical subjects are judged negatively by Hungarian society. Taking her belief into consideration, it appears that in the pre-actional phase the desire to be integrated into society and to earn its respect might be the core driving force of motivation. Learners' beliefs are usually created by the learners themselves through listening to others' opinions and experiences. Society's negative judgement, therefore, can be a strong shaping force of students' beliefs. The feeling of being accepted is a crucial element in a person's life. It is no surprise that students studying in the field of Humanities can feel stigmatized from time to time by the harsh comments on the part of society.

The coded segments belonging to 'environmental support' seem to suggest that being part of a community does not only play an important role in the participants' choice of university or training, but it also ensures the major supporting force for them. Besides heavily influencing their initial choices, members of personal communities, such as relatives, friends, and fellow students, play an active role in sustaining motivation during the actional phase. Students in the actional phase claimed that their family and classmates were their major source of moral and practical support. Bahman, who considers himself a "digital immigrant" and sometimes feels uncomfortable with many computerized areas of university life (i.e., online course materials, having to sign up for courses online, etc.) claimed that he could always count on the support of his peers (e.g., "My peers always give me a hand if I am in

need of help.”); whereas Gyöngyi highlighted the importance of her family’s support (e.g., “If I am very busy with my school stuff, I don’t have to do the household chores. They let me study and they don’t bother me.”). Interestingly, former graduates, who offered a retrospective and more comprehensive view on the effect of environmental support, also emphasized the motivating effect of the moral and practical support they received from the people around them. Judit highlighted the important role of her teachers (“The teachers were all very supportive. When I asked for help, they helped me cordially.”), while Alíz spoke mostly about the financial and moral support she received from her family (“My family supported me both morally and financially. My boyfriend was also very understanding during the difficult times.”).

Goals and plans also go through a notable change during the three stages. In general, all six participants started their studies with a more or less defined, concrete goal they wanted to reach. However, during the different phases of their studies, these goals broaden considerably (see *Figure 1*).

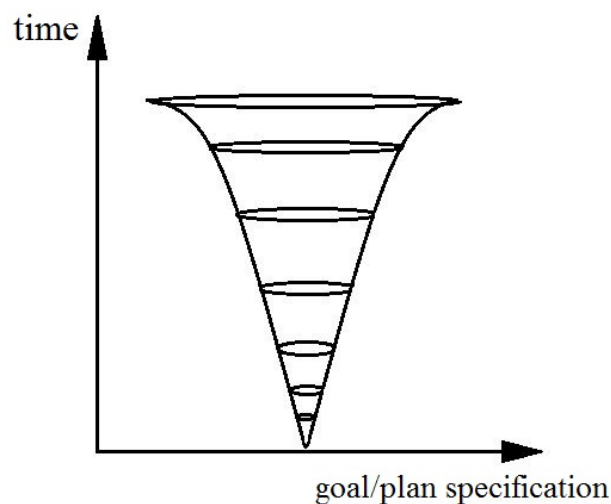


Figure 1. The expanding nature of goals and plans

To the question about their plans after the MA programme, the first year students managed to give definite answers, like “I want to research the foreign language learning of deaf students” (Anna) or “I will probably continue teaching at a language school or something similar” (Emma). Contrariwise, students in the actional phase were more hesitant with their answers, and both of them emphasized that at the time of the interview they were not sure what work they would be able to find using their degrees. However, both of them were open to any possibilities as long as they could use their language knowledge. This change might have occurred due to the fact that both students were in the penultimate semester of their studies and their motivation might have been influenced by the impending stress of finding a desirable job and becoming financially fully independent. Still, the broadening of the goals and plans was the most striking in the data gathered from Judit, one of the former graduates. Initially Judit wanted to become a teacher and even planned to do a PhD in Applied Linguistics but by the end of the MA programme, she had changed her mind and these days she is an office worker at an international company. Both former graduates emphasized that despite their initial plans to become teachers and translators, now they are fully satisfied with working at office jobs that draw on their advanced English language proficiency and the skills they acquired during their studies. Compared to the students in the actional phase, graduates

seemed to be more positive and open-minded in connection with their job opportunities, as they appeared to rely more on the acquired skills than on the qualifications (or the lack of job-specific qualifications for that matter) offered by their degree.

In the collected data set, the most salient difference between the goals of the students in the pre-actional phase of their studies and the goals of those in the post-actional phase was the fact that first-year students mostly concentrated on jobs where they could apply the factual knowledge they would acquire during their AL studies; whereas post-graduates valued the text processing, writing, and learning skills and the advanced language proficiency they acquired during the MA programme more than the factual knowledge.

Taking everything into consideration, participation in the MA programme can be viewed as a journey, where different motivational elements become salient at different stages of the progress (see *Figure 2.*).

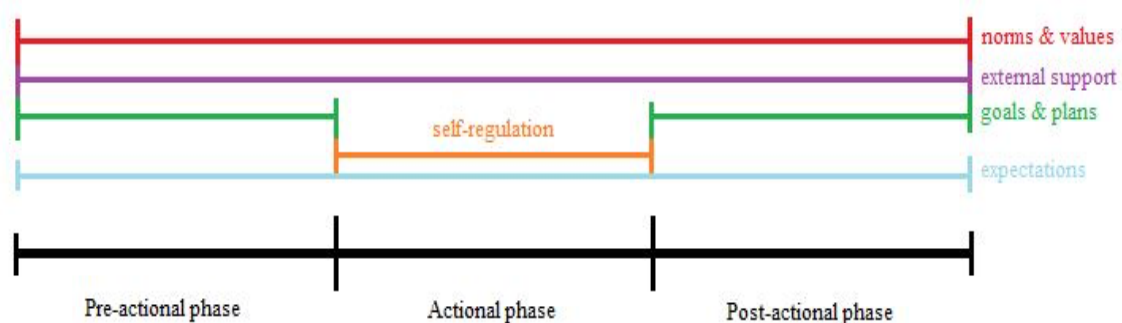


Figure 2. The importance of the different themes along the motivation process

Based on the interview data, the motivation of AL MA students seems to be a dynamically changing construct (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Ushioda, 2009). Some elements, such as norms and values, external support, and expectations, have notable motivating influence at each stage of the process. As has already been discussed, these themes manifest themselves in different forms in the pre-actional, actional, and post-actional phase, but the students, regardless of the group they belonged, all mentioned how important the internal and external values and the support of the people around them were with regard to their motivation.

In contrast, goals and plans seemed to exercise the strongest influence during the pre-actional and the post-actional phase, whereas self-regulation, not surprisingly, appeared to be the most important during the actional phase. This might be due to the fact that pre-actional and post-actional phases are heavily centred on setting and reaching the final goal, so most of the action is motivated by this purpose; while the actional phase is about execution and is more action-oriented. Therefore, during task execution self-regulation seems to be a more necessary and more effective element of motivation than keeping the final goal in mind.

## 6 Conclusions

In conclusion, the motivation processes of AL MA students can be examined on both a micro level (i.e. daily basis of motivation) and a macro level (i.e. overarching motivation

during one's university studies). The traces of the elements of Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model of L2 motivation and Ushioda's (2009) person in context relational view could be detected in the collected data. On the basis of the interviews, the fluctuation of the AL-MA students' motivation processes could also be divided into three stages: the pre-actional, actional, and post actional phases. These processes seem to be cyclical and present both on a micro level, influencing how students approach their everyday tasks, and on a macro level, reinforcing the view of the whole MA programme as one overarching process.

If one draws a parallel with Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) model, the three groups of participants correspond to the three phases of the process model, first-year students representing the pre-actional phase, second-years being in the actional phase, and MA graduates representing the retrospective evaluation of the post-actional phase. Even though in connection with the different groups the same emerging themes could be observed, the same elements seemed to play slightly different roles in each phase. Moreover, if the influence of the emerging themes is examined on a macro level, the MA programme can be considered as a journey, where the effect of the motivational elements constantly changes and fluctuates, and at each stage a different element becomes the most influential one.

The current study is a small scale qualitative research project featuring only six participants, so large-scale data collection might prove to be helpful and might lead to a more in-depth understanding of the motivation processes of English MA students. Since this is a cross-sectional study, the major differences between the motivation processes of the different groups could only be inferred and a longitudinal study following the participants' progress from the first semester to graduation may provide a more accurate insight into the dynamics and fluctuation of their motivation. Large-scale questionnaire studies based on the results of this qualitative research might also be able to offer further information on the issue.

As the interviews with MA graduate students seem to suggest that Applied Linguistics MA training teaches the students attending it valuable skills that can be used in many professional fields, in-depth case studies and further elaboration on the topic could also provide much-needed information about the usefulness of the MA in English Studies programme. Making the skills and qualifications offered by this programme transparent might help restore the positive value judgment attached to English Studies in Hungary. In addition, further academic and non-academic discussion of the topic is also needed in order to familiarize employers in Hungary with the potential and skills of employees holding an MA degree in English.

On the basis of the emerging results of the current study it can be concluded that the motivation process of Applied Linguistics MA students is a highly complex issue. However, gaining insight into these processes can offer useful information both for students and teachers. Being aware of the possible elements of motivation and the dynamics between these elements might help students to create realistic goals for themselves and keep themselves motivated, and teachers to find the best ways to support their students and help them effectively to pursue their goals.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview schedule for first-year MA students – translated into English

In the following interview we would like to ask you to answer a few questions in connection with your university studies. Please give us as detailed responses as possible and please be as honest as you can. We assure you that your answers will remain confidential and they will not be shown to anyone. Thank you very much for your help.

#### *Introductory questions:*

How old are you?

Where do you live? (Where do you come from?)

Is your university training state-subsidized or do you pay for it yourself?

What languages do you learn/have you been learning? Where do you learn/have you been learning them? For how long have you been learning them?

*Core questions:* Now we would like to ask you a few questions regarding your university studies.

1. For how long have you been learning English?
2. Why did you start learning English?
3. Why did you choose English Studies as your BA major?
4. How did you come to this decision? Did anyone or anything influence you in your decision? Why did you think it was going to be a good decision?
5. What kind of goals did you have in mind when you applied for this university major? Did these goals change later on?
6. Do you feel that you have reached/you are going to reach these goals?
7. What did/do you do to achieve these goals? To what extent was/is it difficult to do so?
8. If you were to start again, would you choose English Studies as your university major again? If your answer is yes, why would you do so? If your answer is no, why would not you do so?
9. Why did you choose English Applied Linguistics as your MA track?
10. What are your expectations in connection with this track? What do you think it will be like? What classes will you have?
11. Why did you choose this university for your MA studies?
12. To what extent do your teachers encourage you regarding your studies?
13. What do you think about your Introduction to Applied Linguistics lecture series? To what extent do you think these lecture are interesting and useful?
14. Do you ever think of changing your Applied Linguistics track to another track based on the first year introductory lectures you have attended? What other track would you change to? Why would that be better?
15. How much time do you devote to your studies (classes + preparing for the classes) on a weekly basis? Do you think it is worth the trouble and the energy?
16. Do you work besides your studies? How do you manage your time?
17. Do you think the things learnt here will be helpful when it comes to applying for a job?
18. When you loathe the very idea of studying for a given class, how can you persuade yourself to do the particular tasks after all?
19. Who helps you in achieving your goals?
20. Who helps you in fulfilling the tasks?
21. To what do you owe your achievements?
22. Have you ever felt during your university years that you would abandon your studies and never continue them? How could you overcome such a situation and continue after all?



## APPENDIX B

### Interview schedule for second-year MA students – translated into English

In the following interview we would like to ask you to answer a few questions in connection with your university studies. Please give us as detailed responses as possible and please be as honest as you can. We assure you that your answers will remain confidential and they will not be shown to anyone. Thank you very much for your help.

#### *Introductory questions:*

How old are you?

Where do you live? (Where do you come from?)

Is your university training state-subsidized or do you pay for it yourself?

What languages do you learn/have you been learning? Where do you learn/have you been learning them? For how long have you been learning them?

*Core questions:* Now we would like to ask you a few questions regarding your university studies.

1. For how long have you been learning English?

2. Why did you start learning English?

3. Why did you choose English Studies as your BA major?

4. How did you come to this decision? Did anyone or anything influence you in your decision? Why did you think it was going to be a good decision?

5. What kind of goals did you have in mind when you applied for this university major? Did these goals change later on?

6. Do you feel that you have reached/you are going to reach these goals?

7. What did/do you do to achieve these goals? To what extent was/is it difficult to do so?

8. If you were to start again, would you choose English Studies as your university major again? If your answer is yes, why would you do so? If your answer is no, why would not you do so?

9. Why did you choose English Applied Linguistics as your MA track?

10. What were your expectations in connection with this track? What did you think it would be like? What classes would you have?

11. How was it different from what you had expected?

12. Why did you choose this university for your MA studies?

13. To what extent do your teachers encourage you regarding your studies?

14. What do you think about your Applied Linguistics classes? To what extent do you think these classes are interesting and useful? Please, tell us in detail.

15. What would you change in connection with the courses or the programme itself?

16. Did you consider changing your Applied Linguistics track to another track based on the first year introductory lectures you attended?

17. How much time do you devote to your studies? Do you think it is worth the trouble and the energy?

18. Do you work besides your studies? How do you manage your time?

19. Do you think the things learnt here will be/were helpful when it comes to applying for a job?

20. What plans do you have for the future?

21. What do you plan to do after finishing university?

22. When you loathe the very idea of studying for a given class, how can you persuade yourself to do the particular tasks after all?

23. Who helps you in achieving your goals?

24. Who helps you in fulfilling the tasks?

25. To what do you owe your achievements?

26. Have you ever felt during your university years that you would abandon your studies and never continue them? How could you overcome such a situation and continue after all?

## APPENDIX C

### Interview schedule for MA graduate students – translated into English

In the following interview we would like to ask you to answer a few questions in connection with your university studies. Please give us as detailed responses as possible and please be as honest as you can. We assure you that your answers will remain confidential and they will not be shown to anyone. Thank you very much for your help.

#### *Introductory questions:*

How old are you?

Where do you live? (Where do you come from?)

Was your university training state-subsidized or did you pay for it yourself?

What languages do you learn/have you been learning? Where do you learn/have you been learning them? For how long have you been learning them? What are you using these languages for at the moment?

*Core questions:* Now we would like to ask you a few questions regarding your university studies.

1. For how long have you been learning English?
  2. Why did you start learning English?
  3. Why did you choose English Studies as your BA major?
  4. When did you finish university (MA)?
  5. What did you write your thesis about?
  6. What was the final examination like?
  7. How did you come to the decision to choose English Studies as your university major? Did anyone or anything influence you in your decision? Why did you think it was going to be a good decision?
  8. What kind of goals did you have in mind when you applied for this university major? Did these goals change later on?
  9. Do you feel that you have reached these goals?
  10. What did you do to achieve these goals? To what extent was it difficult to do so?
- If you were to start again, would you choose English Studies as your university major again?
11. If your answer is yes, why would you do so? If your answer is no, why would you not do so?
  12. Why did you choose English Applied Linguistics as your MA track?
  13. What were your expectations in connection with this track? What did you think it would be like? What classes would you have?
  14. How was it different from what you had expected?
  15. Why did you choose this university for your MA studies?
  16. To what extent did your teachers encourage you regarding your studies?
  17. What do you think about your Applied Linguistics classes? To what extent were these classes interesting and useful?
  18. What would you change in connection with the courses or the programme itself?
  19. Do you remember your first-year introductory lectures? Did you consider changing your Applied Linguistics track to another one on the basis of these lectures?
  20. How much time did you devote to your studies? Do you think it was worth the trouble and the energy?
  21. Did you work besides your studies? How did you manage your time?
  22. Do you think the things learnt in the programme were helpful when it came to applying for a job?

23. When you loathed the very idea of studying for a given class, how could you persuade yourself to do the particular tasks after all?
24. Who helped you in achieving your goals?
25. Who helped you in fulfilling the tasks?
26. To what do you owe your achievements?
27. To what do you owe your success of having done this track well? Was it worth doing it?
28. Did you ever feel during your university years that you would abandon your studies and never continue them? How could you overcome such a situation and continue after all?
29. How do you remember your MA studies?
30. What do you do now? How did you find a job? Tell us what was easy and difficult in finding a job.
31. Do you like what you are doing? Would you prefer to be doing something else? What would you prefer to be doing?
32. What do your bosses think of your work? What kind of feedback do you get?
33. Do you think of continuing your studies?
34. Are the things learnt in the English Applied Linguistics track useful in what you are working on now?
35. What can you benefit the most from that you learnt in this track?