A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SPANISH UNIVERSITY FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION: INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, LANGUAGE LEARNING ORIENTATION, AND RESPONSES TO AUTHENTIC INPUT

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ABSTRACT

The present study reports the main findings of a survey-based research conducted on Spanish university foreign language students. The goal was to identify a reliable set of learner beliefs (or factors) for that population associated with: (a) motivation, (b) interest in foreign affairs, (c) language learning orientation and (d) disposition to authentic oral and written materials. For this study we recruited a group of 168 Spanish students of English as a foreign language all students of the first year of English for Chemistry at the Faculty of Chemistry of the Universidad de Oviedo. The qualitative analysis reveals that students tend to have a strong motivation to learn the target language. They show an integrative orientation that coexists with a desire to learn the L2 to achieve some practical goal. Moreover, students tend to show a positive response to oral and written input, willingness to confront authentic input and they tend to use global strategies instead of decoding strategies.

KEY WORDS: Motivation, interest in foreign affairs, language learning orientation, disposition to authentic oral and written materials.

RESUMEN

Este estudio presenta los resultados de una investigación llevada a cabo mediante una encuesta con estudiantes universitarios de inglés como lengua extranjera. El objetivo de este estudio era identificar una serie de creencias o factores de esa población asociados con: (a) motivación, (b) interés en cuestiones extranjeras, (c) orientación en el aprendizaje de la lengua, y (d) disposición hacia los materiales orales y escritos auténticos. Para este estudio reclutamos un grupo de 168 estudiantes españoles de inglés como lengua extranjera, todos ellos estudiantes de primer curso de inglés para Químicas en la Facultad de Químicas de la Universidad de Oviedo. El análisis muestra que los estudiantes tienden a mostrar una fuerte motivación para aprender la lengua meta. En ellos coexisten una orientación integradora con un deseo de aprender la lengua meta para obtener algún objetivo práctico. Además, los estudiantes tienden a mostrar una respuesta positiva hacia el input oral y escrito, deseo de enfrentarse a input auténtico y tienden a usar estrategias globales en vez de estrategias de descodificación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: motivación, interés en cuestiones extranjeras, orientación en el aprendizaje de la lengua, disposición hacia los materiales orales y escritos auténticos.

1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of learner variables on second language learning is an important issue within second language acquisition research. One of the focuses of interest is on the complex relationship between learner characteristics and language learning performance. Affective variables, such as attitude, orientations, anxiety and motivation, have been shown to be at least as important as language aptitude for predicting L2 achievement or proficiency (Gardner, 1985). Motivation is considered by many to be one of the main determining factors in success in developing a second or foreign language (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Clément, 1990). Motivation determines the extent of active, personal involvement in L2 learning. Conversely, unmotivated students are insufficiently involved and therefore unable to develop their potential L2 skills (Oxford & Shearin, 1994:12). Research by Beebe (1983) shows that personality variables, such as the willingness to take risks, are powerful determinants of the propensity to interact in the target language. Horwitz and her colleagues (1985, 1986, 1989) show the profound effects on learner behaviour of both beliefs about language and affective responses to specific language learning situations.

Research shows that motivation directly influences how often students use L2 learning strategies, how much students interact with native speakers, how much input they receive in the language being learned, how well they do on curriculum-related achievement tests, how high their general proficiency level becomes, and how long they persevere and maintain L2 skills after language study is over (Ely, 1986; Gardner, 1992; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

As Oxford & Shearin (1994) state, students' motivations for learning a language are individualistic and multifaceted. Teachers need to know what these motivations are and how to build on them.

This paper presents the results of the qualitative analysis of a survey conducted on first-year Spanish students at the Universidad de Oviedo. The goal was to analyse learner motivation, their interest in foreign affairs, their strategies toward language learning and their response to authentic input. This analysis is the starting point for future research on the relationship between learner characteristics and language learning performance.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. MOTIVATION IN L2 LEARNING

The socioeducational model of L2 acquisition (Gardner, 1985) proposes that two basic attitudes —integrativeness and attitude towards the learning situation- contribute to the learner's level of L2 learning motivation. The level of motivation, in turn, influences the linguistic outcome (e.g. achievement or proficiency). A number of empirical studies support this model (Gardner, 1980, 1985, 1988; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

Integrativeness refers to the desire to learn a L2 in order to meet and communicate with members of the L2 community. Attitudes toward the learning situation are measured by an evaluation of the L2 teacher and the L2 course. The motivation component is made up of the desire to learn the L2, motivational intensity (effort), and attitudes toward learning the L2. According to Gardner (1985), a truly motivated individual will possess all three of these characteristics; therefore, these components of motivation can be kept separate or combined into a single attitude/motivation index (as in Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

The applicability of the socio-educational model in the foreign language context has been questioned by some researchers. Research has shown that instrumental motivation (a desire to learn the L2 to achieve some practical goal, such as job advancement or course credit) is equally or more important in various foreign language learning contexts (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; Dörnyei, 1990; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992). As Dörnyei (1990:49) pointed out, in foreign language learning situations, "affective predisposition toward the target language community is unlikely to explain a great proportion of the variance in language attainment". Some studies show that the desire for contact and identification with members of the L2 group is not fundamental to the motivational process, but has relevance only in specific sociocultural contexts (e.g. Belmechri & Hummel, 1998; Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994). Clément & Kruidenier (1983) emphasized the need to define the integrative orientation operationally and other orientations that are relevant to a particular context.

Following the procedures used by Ely (1986), Clément, Dörney, & Noels (1994), and Belmechri & Hummel (1998), Yashima (2000) investigated the orientations for learning EFL among Japanese college students and identified an orientation similar to the integrative orientation, but somewhat different in the sense that it reflected the role of English as a lingua franca, with the target community not clearly specified. This orientation labelled "intercultural friendship orientation" along with "instrumental orientation" predicted the strength of motivation and motivation in turn predicted proficiency.

2.2. The use of authentic materials

It seems that authentic materials provide the necessary context for relating form to meaning in language learning and they are regarded as motivators and as a means to overcome the cultural barrier to language learning (e.g. Bacon, 1987; Nostrand, 1989; Westphal, 1986). In the last twenty years the pedagogical trend is in the direction of increased use of authentic input in language instruction (e.g. Geltirch-Ludgate & Tovar, 1987; Rodgers & Medley, 1988; Lewis, 1993, 1997, Willis, D. 1999, Willis, J. 1999). But a clear understanding of the mechanisms of interaction between learner and authentic texts is required to provide the basis for sound pedagogical use of authentic input. Research is essential to understand how to prepare both materials and students for effective language instruction. Very little empirical research exists on the learners' responses to authentic input. A few studies have emerged at the levels of primary and secondary education. Kienbaum, Russell, and Welty

(1986) compared traditional classroom contexts (elementary school) with communicative contexts characterized primarily by the use of authentic materials. Although test results showed no significant differences between the groups in language performance, an attitude survey revealed favourable attitudes toward the absence of the traditional textbook and a high degree of interest in current events materials. Bernhardt & Berkemeyer (1988) found that high school students of German at all levels were able to handle all authentic text types and that students fell into three levels of comprehension associated with years of language study. Allen, Bernhardt, Berry & Demel (1988) did the general study that encompasses Bernhardt & Berkemeyer (1988). They tested 1,500 high school students with from one to five years of language instruction for comprehension of authentic texts at three levels of difficulty. They found that the subjects in the study could deal with all of the authentic texts they were asked to read. Furthermore, even beginners could cope with authentic texts of considerable length, 250-300 words. The researchers found that target language and level of instruction were a more important correlate of comprehension than was text difficulty. Bacon & Finneman (1990) in their study conducted on first-year Spanish students at two major mid-western universities conclude that exposure to authentic input has a positive effect on comprehension and satisfaction and a negative effect on frustration. Their study also reinforces the importance of attending to students' affective needs and general language learning strategies when interacting with authentic input.

Willingness to communicate is emerging as a concept useful in accounting for individuals' first language and second language communication. The concept first developed in L1 communication by McCroskey and his associates (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) was applied to L2 communication by MacIntyre & Charos (1996). As the emphasis in L2 teaching and learning has been shifting to communication, both as a necessary process and as a goal of learning a L2, a way to account for individual differences in L2 communication is needed. MacIntyre & Charos (1996) and MacIntyre & Clément (1996) demonstrated the possibility by combining insights from two disciplines, L2 acquisition and communication.

The concept "willingness to communicate" refers to the tendency of an individual to initiate communication when free to do so (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, 1990). This concept includes communication in oral and written form. Studies in Canada (MacIntyre & Clément, 1996) show that the level of motivation influences willingness to communicate. Yashima (2002) examined relations among L2 learning and L2 communication variables in the Japanese English as a foreign language context using the willingness to communicate model and the socioeducational model as a framework. A L2 communication model was constructed and tested with a sample of 297 Japanese university students. He found that motivation affected self-confidence in L2 communication which led to willingness to communicate in a L2.

2.3. INTERNATIONAL POSTURE

Recent studies show the importance of analysing students' attitudes toward what English symbolizes. This is believed to affect the learner's L2 learning and

communication behaviour. In the study mentioned above Yashima (2002) also examined this variable. In his model the variable of international posture was hypothesized to capture the general attitude toward the international community and foreign language learning in Japan. Included in the concept are interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners and openness toward different cultures.

He found that international posture appeared to influence motivation, which in turn influenced proficiency in English. In addition to this indirect path, a direct path from international posture to willingness to communicate in a L2 was significant. The more internationally oriented an individual was, the more willing he or she was to communicate in English. Such individuals are also more motivated to study English, and this motivation, in turn, contributes to proficiency and confidence in L2 communication.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper reports the main findings of a survey-based research conducted on Spanish students of Chemistry at the Universidad de Oviedo. The goal was to identify a reliable set of learner beliefs (or factors) for that population associated with: (a) motivation, (b) interest in foreign affairs, (c) language learning orientation and (d) disposition to authentic oral and written materials.

3.1. SUBJECTS

For this study we recruited a group of 168 Spanish students of English as a foreign language, all students of the first year of English for Chemistry at the Faculty of Chemistry of the Universidad de Oviedo.

3.2. PROCEDURE

Questionnaires containing measures of the aforementioned motivation, interest in foreign affairs, language learning orientation and disposition to authentic oral and written materials were administered to the participants in January 2003.

3.3. MEASURES

For the present study several measures were either taken or developed from previous studies. A brief description of the measures follows.

For motivation items from Gardner and Lambert (1972) concerning motivation intensity and desire to learn English served as the measures.

Six items on Motivational Intensity (Cronbach's $\alpha= .7854$) were taken from a research by Gardner & Lambert (1972). The original format was changed to a 5-

point scale. The students were to rate the degree to which each statement matched their state of mind.

The other measure of motivation consisted of six items defined under the rubric of Desire to learn English (Cronbach's α= .7458) from Gardner & Lambert (1972). The original format was again changed to a 5-point scale.

Two items (Cronbach's α= .7780) reflected students' interest in international issues. They are: "I often read and watch news about foreign countries" and "I often talk about situations and events in foreign countries with my family and/or friends". Ratings were recorded on a 5-point scale.

We also used two scales based on Bacon & Finemann's (1990) scale. The first scale (Cronbach's α= .8849) referred to language learning in general and included: reasons why students chose to study English, the aspects they consider important in learning English, what helps them most in learning English.

The second scale (Cronbach's α= .6871) referred to students' willingness to confront authentic input: what they would do if they overheard people speaking in English, if they saw a real English-language text (newspaper, magazine) and if a native speaker of English were to speak to them.

We included three items about perceived exposure to authentic texts. Finally, we also included demographic information.

All the items grouped by scale are shown in the Appendix.

3.4. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

We analysed the data with SPSS statistical software. Specifically, we used a SPSS program version 10.0 for Windows.

We will begin analysing the demographic information gathered, which is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	
ITEMS	PERCENTAGE
Age	18.96
Men	35.4
Women	64.2
Individuals that have studied English in high school	97.1
Individuals that have travelled to an English-speaking country	10
Individuals that have lived in an English-speaking country	2.2
Individuals that have English-speaking friends	47.4
Individuals that use English outside the English class	31.7
Individuals that consider English important for their formation	97.8
Individuals that consider English important for their future career	97.8

As we can see, the students' average age is 18.96. With respect to their sex, there are more women than men. Almost all the individuals have studied English in high school. Besides, they for the most part think English is important for their formation as well as for their future career. However, a very small proportion has travelled to an English-speaking country or has lived in an English-speaking country. The percentage of students that have English-speaking friends is quite high (47.4) but a smaller percentage of them (31.7%) use English outside the English class. Almost none of them (2.9%) use English at home.

We then have a group of young students, for the most part women, who have studied English in high school and regard English as important for their studies and future career but who have not lived or travelled to an English speaking country and whose use of English outside the English class is low.

We will next go on to analyse the results of the different scales utilised in this study beginning with the Motivational Intensity scale. The means corresponding to each item in this scale are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. MOTIVATIONAL INTENSITY	
ITEMS	MEAN
I think I spend fairly long hours studying English	3.84
I really try to learn English	3.8333
After I graduate from college, I will continue to study English and try to improve	3.7086
If English were not taught at school, I would study it on my own	3.5166
Compared to my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard	3.2119
I often think about the words and ideas which I learn about in my English classes	3.0397

As we can observe, the means are quite high in all cases, the highest means corresponding to those items concerning the time students spend learning English ("I think I spend fairly long hours studying English") and how hard they try to learn the target language ("I really try to learn English"). It is interesting to note that a considerable number of students want to study English after they graduate form college and affirm that they would study English even if it was not taught at school. From the results obtained we can conclude that our students tend to have a strong motivation to learn the target language.

The other measure of motivation was Desire to learn English. The means of the six items defined under this rubric are in Table 3.

TABLE 3. DESIRE TO LEARN ENGLISH	
ITEMS	MEAN
I believe absolutely English should be taught at university	3.7237
During English classes I'm absorbed in what is taught and concentrate on my studies	3.2667

When I have assignments to do in English, I try to do them immediately	3.2252
I would read English newspapers or magazines outside my English course work	2.7105
I find studying English more interesting than other subjects	2.9669
I would like the number of English classes increased	2.9145

The means are again high. Students believe English should be taught at university and show a positive disposition to study English. These results are in agreement with the analysis of the previous scale and confirm the importance students attach to learning English, a subject that they also regard as interesting.

The items under Interest in foreign affairs obtain high means, as shown in table 4.

TABLE 4. INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS	
ITEMS	MEAN
I often read and watch news about foreign countries	3.6711
I often talk about situations and events in foreign countries with my family and/or friends	3.5960

We can say from these results that our students tend to be interested in foreign or international affairs. Here we can identify aspects of an integrative orientation on the part of the students. It is not surprising that these individuals who are motivated to study English as we concluded from the analyses of the motivation scales above, are also internationally oriented, as this is in agreement with the results of some recent studies like that by Yashima (2002) that finds out that the more internationally oriented an individual is, the more willing he or she is to communicate in English and the more motivated to study English.

We will go on to analyse the next three scales that involve students' language learning orientation. With respect to the scale concerning The Reasons Why Students Study English, the means corresponding to each item are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5. THE REASONS WHY STUDENTS STUDY ENGLISH	
ITEMS	MEAN
It may help me get a job	4.4130
It is part of a well-rounded education	4.0652
I hope to use it in my future career	3.5468
I want to be able to communicate with native speakers	3.3768
I'd like to use English if I travel	2.9985
It takes up little time	2.9928
I want to understand English culture	2.8

Easy grade	2.7481
English is easier than other languages	2.6861
I like thinking in English	2.1691

As we can see, the highest means correspond to items that express a desire to learn the target language to achieve some practical goal, that see English as useful. Here we observe an instrumental orientation. We have identified aspects of an integrative orientation in the subjects' interest in foreign or international affairs. We can then conclude that our students tend to show both an integrative and an instrumental orientation, that is both friendship and vocational interest in the target language.

On the other hand, students also see English as a subject not taking up much time and easy. The means of the items "it takes up little time", "easy grade" and "English is easier than other languages" are quite high. Finally, students tend to be interested in understanding the culture of the language they study.

With respect to the scale concerning the Aspects Students Consider Important in Learning English, the means corresponding to each item appear in Table 6.

TABLE 6. ASPECTS STUDENTS CONSIDER IMPORTANT IN LEARNING ENGLISH	
ITEMS	MEAN
Being able to express myself to a native speaker	4.6115
Getting my ideas across in English	4.5182
Understanding when a native speaker talks	4.4460
Learning/sharing ideas with another	4.1159
Getting sounds right	4.1152
Understanding if someone wrote to me	4.1151
Being able to write to someone in English.	4.0288
Knowing all grammar rules	3.9710
Getting all the accents and spelling right	3.8531
Hearing each word when someone speaks	3.8417
Knowing all the words	3.5540
Hearing all the endings on the words	3.3723
Understanding the culture	2.6043

As the table above shows, the highest means correspond to items concerning the use of English for communication, both oral and written (expressing one-

self in English and understanding when a native speaker talks, and being able to understand and write correspondence). However, individuals consider grammar and structural aspects important in learning English, as well. Thus, "knowing all grammar rules", "knowing all the words," "getting all the accents and spelling right," "hearing each word when someone speaks" and "hearing all the endings on the words" get all quite high means. Again, students tend to be interested in understanding the culture of the language they study.

In general we can say that students seem to give more importance to using English for communication than to knowing grammar rules and the structure of the language, although they also attach importance to these in learning English, they consider them important aspects in their learning process.

The following items refer to the question of What Helps Students Most in Learning English. Let's see the means obtained in Table 7.

TABLE 7. WHAT HELPS STUDENTS MOST IN LEARNING ENGLISH	
ITEMS	MEAN
Hearing English spoken	3.9197
Translating in my head what I hear	3.9118
Translate what I read/hear to Spanish	3.7883
Finding new ways to use English with others	3.5956
Being called on in class	3.5147
Expressing myself to others in small groups	3.4815
Listening to tapes	3.4119
Keep my dictionary close by	3.3706
Writing words over and over	3.31
Study the text by myself	3.2507
Reading grammar explanations	3.2434
Memorizing grammar rules	3.2353
Working it out my myself	3.2353
Compare English with Spanish	3.0963
Rehearse in my head before I speak	3.0976
Guessing at what may be going on	3.0881
Memorizing vocabulary lists	3.0741
Repeat what I hear on a tape	2.8507

Here we find that the highest means correspond to items concerning oral strategies: hear English spoken, finding ways to use English with others, to be called on in class, express myself in groups and listening to tapes. Items concerning non-

oral strategies and translation ("translate in my head what I hear," "translate what I read/hear to Spanish," "writing words over and over" and "keep my dictionary close by") are also given considerable importance.

The items that refer to grammar ("memorizing grammar rules" and "reading grammar explanations") also get quite high means.

A couple of things are also worth pointing out. First, the importance students attach to independent learning. Thus, "studying the text by myself" and "working it out my myself" get high means. And second, the relatively high mean of the statement that refers to memorizing vocabulary lists.

We can then, conclude that although initial indications with respect to the use of English for communication and the preference for oral strategies are promising, we have to admit that an appreciable number of students still want materials associated with traditional language instruction: vocabulary lists, grammar review items and non oral strategies.

We will next analyse the scales concerning the Subjects' Disposition to Authentic Input. We will begin with the items referring to speaking. These items ask students what they would do if they overhead people speaking in English. The results appear in Table 8.

TABLE 8. AUTHENTIC INPUT (LISTENING)	
Items	Mean
I would try to get the gist	4.4161
I would feel satisfied if I understand some	4.2044
I would listen for key words and guess at meaning	3.9197
I would listen for known words	3.6788
I would guess from context	3.5185
I would grasp the basic concept	3.4453
I would think of the meaning in Spanish	3.1880
I would understand most	2.8832
I would get only a few details	2.3985
I would get frustrated	2.3456
I would feel uncomfortable	2.2794
I would get discouraged	2.1324
I would listen for subject/verb/object	2.0667
I would concentrate on each word	2.0574
I would translate each word as fast as I could	2.0294
I would not bother to listen	1.50
I would not be interested	1.4812

The highest means correspond to items that refer to global strategies, that is strategies that focus on understanding the gist, using key words and the context to guess meaning ("I would try to get the gist", "I would listen for key words and guess at meaning," "I would listen for known words," "I would guess from context" and "I would think of the meaning in Spanish"), and those items that show satisfaction, a positive attitude to authentic input ("I would feel satisfied if I understand some," "I would grasp the basic concept" and "I would understand most").

The lowest means correspond to items that show unwillingness to confront authentic input: "I would not bother to listen" and "I would not be interested"; items that refer to decoding strategies, that is, strategies that concentrate on the word: "I would concentrate on each word," "I would listen for subject/verb/object" and "I would translate each word as fast as I could"; and items that express frustration: "I would get only a few details," "I would get frustrated," "I would feel uncomfortable" and "I would get discouraged."

With respect to the scale that refers to the subjects' disposition to reading, specifically to what students would do if they saw a real English-language text (newspaper, magazine), the results are in Table 9.

TABLE 9. AUTHENTIC INPUT (READING)	
ITEMS	MEAN
I would pick it up and try to read it	4.0803
I would feel a sense that my study of English had helped	4.0438
I would feel satisfied that I understand some	4.0362
I would look for familiar words and guess at meaning	3.8676
I would grasp basic concepts	3.7536
I would read the title and guess at the content	3.6350
I would understand most	3.3431
I would find my knowledge of vocabulary inadequate	3.2263
I would reach for my dictionary	2.9565
I would write the words in Spanish.	2.9270
I would find my knowledge of grammar inadequate	2.7721
I would look at the endings on the words	2.4265
I would read each word one at a time	2.1838
I would get frustrated	1.9416
I would not be interested	1.5038

The results coincide with those of the scale analysed above. Thus, the highest means correspond to the items that show willingness to confront authentic

input ("I would pick it up and try to read it"), satisfaction or a positive attitude to authentic input ("I would feel a sense that my study of English had helped", "I would feel satisfied that I understand some", "I would grasp basic concepts" and "I would understand most"), and items concerning global strategies ("I would look for familiar words and guess at meaning" and "I would read the title and guess at the content").

The lowest means correspond to items that show frustration ("I would get frustrated"), unwillingness to confront authentic input ("I would not be interested") and decoding strategies ("I would read each word one at a time" and "I would look at the endings on the words").

Although the items that refer to frustration present low means, students, nevertheless, express some frustration with respect to their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. The items that refer to these questions ("I would find my knowledge of vocabulary inadequate" and "I would find my knowledge of grammar inadequate") have quite high means. Translation is also important for our students: "I would reach for my dictionary" and "I would write the words in Spanish" get high means.

The next scale concerns subjects' disposition to speaking. The items involve what students would do if a native speaker of English were to speak to them. The results appear in Table 10.

TABLE 10. AUTHENTIC INPUT (SPEAKING)	
I would feel satisfied that I can communicate	4.8394
I would try out what I've learned in English	4.4565
I would listen to get the gist of what was being said to me	4.3212
I would try to speak back	4.2701
I would ask to slow down	4.2029
I would feel a sense that my study of English had helped	4.1898
I would ask questions to help me understand	3.8162
I would listen for key words	3.7007
I would get the gist of what is said	3.6074
I would understand most	3.0217
I would try to translate every word in my head	2.5012
I would try to hear all the verb endings	2.4910
I would get embarrassed	2.0588
I would get frustrated	1.9493
I would not be interested in having conversation	1.5221
I would avoid conversation	1.5182

The highest means correspond to items that show satisfaction or a positive attitude to authentic input ("I would feel satisfied that I can communicate," "I would feel a sense that my study of English had helped," "I would get the gist of what is said" and "I would understand most"), willingness to use authentic input ("I would try out what I've learned in English," "I would try to speak back" and "I would ask questions to help me understand"), and global strategies ("I would listen to get the gist of what was being said to me," "I would ask to slow down" and "I would listen for key words").

The lowest means correspond to items that refer to unwillingness to use authentic input ("I would avoid conversation" and "I would not be interested in having conversation"), items concerning frustration ("I would get embarrassed" and "I would get frustrated") and items concerning decoding strategies ("I would try to hear all the verb endings"). Translation is attached considerable importance.

As part of our qualitative analysis, we also analysed the students' perceived exposure to authentic texts. The results are in Table 11.

TABLE 11. PERCEIVED EXPOSURE TO AUTHENTIC TEXTS	
I have heard people conversing in English	3.2761
I have read newspapers/magazines/texts for native speakers of English	2.8657
I have had native speakers speak to me	2.7388

From the results obtained we can say that students have experience of listening to English, reading and speaking in English. The highest mean corresponds to listening to people conversing, followed by reading English texts and finally speaking in English. The means are all high. Thus, we can say that the subjects not only show willingness to confront input, as the previous analyses in this paper show, but also have experience of confronting authentic oral and written input.

4. CONCLUSION

Within a framework that views learner variables as exercising a powerful influence on second language learning, we carry out a study that examines Spanish University foreign language students' motivation, interest in foreign affairs, language learning orientation and their disposition to authentic oral and written input. Questionnaires containing measures of the aforementioned factors were administered to the participants. This study reports the main findings of a qualitative analysis of the results obtained.

For motivation items concerning motivation intensity and desire to learn English served as the measures. The analysis of the items concerning motivation intensity reveals that students tend to show a strong motivation to learn English. They tend to spend long hours learning English and affirm that they really try to

learn the target language. They express a desire to study English after they graduate from college and affirm that they would study English even if it was not taught at school. This agrees with the demographic information collected that reveals that a large proportion of the subjects think English is important for their formation and also for their future career.

The tendency revealed by the analysis of the items concerning motivational intensity is supported by the analysis of the items concerning the desire students show to learn English. We find that students are motivated to study English. They believe English should be taught at university, they say they are concentrated during the English classes in what is taught and try to do the assignments immediately. These subjects tend to attach great importance to learning English, a subject that they also regard as interesting.

Students also tend to be interested in foreign or international affairs. That is, they often read and watch news about foreign countries and talk about situations and events in foreign countries with their family and/or friends. This finding is closely related to the previous ones since, as recent studies show internationally oriented individuals are also motivated to study English. And this motivation, in turn, contributes to proficiency and confidence in L2 communication (see, for example Yashima, 2002).

The analysis of the reasons why students choose to study English reveals the individuals' desire to learn the target language to achieve some practical goal, that is, they have an instrumental orientation. The subjects' interest in foreign or international affairs analysed above shows aspects of an integrative orientation. This leads us to conclude that our students tend to show both an integrative and an instrumental orientation, that is, both friendship and vocational interest in the target language.

When we consider the aspects students regard as important in learning English, we see how they tend to give more importance to using English for communication than to knowing grammar rules. However, the analysis reveals quite clearly that students attach considerable importance to grammatical and structural aspects as well. This tendency to consider communication more important than grammar in learning the target language is also observed in the analysis of the items concerning what helps students most in learning English. Similarly, the analysis of those items shows that grammar and non oral strategies are also given considerable importance.

In general, we have to say that despite a considerable interest in using the target language for communication and employing oral strategies, an appreciable number of students still want materials associated with traditional language instruction: vocabulary lists, grammar review items and non oral strategies.

The analysis of the students' disposition to authentic oral and written input is promising. Students show a positive disposition to confront oral and written input. They tend to show satisfaction with their comprehension of the input, that is they have a positive attitude to the input and are willing to deal with and/or be exposed to authentic input. It is worth pointing out the low means of all those items concerning unwillingness to confront authentic input and frustration, which

shows even more clearly the students' positive response to authentic written and oral material.

Furthermore, students tend to use global strategies instead of decoding strategies. That is, students tend to show preference for strategies that approach the input as a whole and focus on extracting the meaning making use of the clues at one's disposal (for example, listening for key words, or words they know and guess at meaning, or reading the title and guess at meaning), instead of concentrating on strategies that focus on the word and on the meaning of each word in the text (for example, concentrating on each word or read each word at a time). Students, then, appear to follow language learning trends that are considered beneficial.

Finally, it is interesting to note that this willingness to confront authentic input is matched by experience of confronting authentic oral and written input on the part of the students. Further research is needed to analyse if there is, as it seems, some correlation between both factors.

As we stated in the introduction to this study, one of the main focus of interest in the study of the influence of learner variables on second language learning is the relationship between learner characteristics and language learning achievement or proficiency. The analysis of this relationship is the ultimate goal of the present study. We have carried out an analysis which has allowed us to elicit Spanish university foreign language students' beliefs about motivation, their interest in foreign affairs, the strategies they prefer for language learning, their perception of comprehension, satisfaction and responses toward authentic input. Although we consider this approach a necessary previous step, we regard it as a starting point for future research towards the ultimate goal of carrying out an empirical study. This empirical study is intended to analyse the relationship between students' motivation, interest in foreign affairs, language learning orientation and disposition to authentic materials, on the one hand, and foreign language proficiency and reading comprehension performance, on the other. Very little empirical research exists on this issue concerning Spanish university students. This type of study is necessary since, as we have seen, research has shown that some of the aforementioned variables are important factors for predicting second language achievement or proficiency.

On the other hand, we also intend to approach other variables equally important like sex and age and analyse the effects of sex and age on motivation, language learning orientation, interest in foreign affairs and disposition to authentic materials.

We hope that the qualitative study we have undertaken in this paper and the future empirical research we intend to carry out will contribute to have a deeper understanding of our students' beliefs and how these influence their L2 achievement.

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APPENDIX

Motivational intensity
Compared to my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard.
I often think about the words and ideas which I learn about in my English classes.
If English were not taught at school, I would study it on my own.
I think I spend fairly long hours studying English.
I really try to learn English
After I graduate from college, I will continue to study English and try to improve.
Desire to learn English
When I have assignments to do in English, I try to do them immediately.
I would read English newspapers or magazines outside my English course work
During English classes I'm absorbed in what is taught and concentrate on my studies.
I would like the number of English classes at school increased.
I believe absolutely English should be taught at university
I find studying English more interesting than other subjects.

Interest in foreign affairs
I often read and watch news about foreign countries
I often talk about situations and events in foreign countries with my family and/or friends.

Language Learning Orientation

Reasons why I chose to study English
It may help me get a job
I want to be able to communicate with native speakers
Easy grade
It is part of a well-rounded education.
I hope to use it in my future career
English is easier than other languages
I want to understand English culture
It takes up little time
I like thinking in English
I'd like to use English if I travel

In learning English, I consider the following aspects important
Knowing all grammar rules
Knowing all the words

Understanding the culture
Getting sounds right
Being able to express myself to a native speaker
Understanding when a native speaker talks
Understanding if someone wrote to me
Getting all the accents and spelling right.
Hearing each word when someone speaks
Being able to write to someone in English
Getting my ideas across in English
Learning/sharing ideas with another
Hearing all the endings on the words.

What helps me most in learning English is
Study the text by myself
Being called on in class
Finding new ways to use English with others
Compare English with Spanish
Guessing at what may be going on
Memorizing grammar rules
Translating in my head what I hear
Hearing English spoken
Writing words over and over
Working it out by myself
Memorizing vocabulary lists
Translate what I read or hear to Spanish
Expressing myself to others in small groups
Listening to tapes
Reading grammar explanations
Repeat what I hear on a tape
Keep my dictionary close by
Rehearse in my head before I speak

Authentic Input

If I overhead people speaking in English, I would probably
Try to get the gist
not bother to listen
understand most
get frustrated
grasp the basic concepts
get only a few details
listen for key words and guess at meaning
guess from the context
feel uncomfortable
translate each word as fast as I could
listen for known words
think of the meaning in Spanish
listen for subject/verb/object
feel satisfied if I understand some

get discouraged
concentrate on each word
not be interested.

If I saw a real English-language text (newspaper, magazine), I would probably
reach for my dictionary
grasp basic concepts
understand most
pick it up and try to read it
get frustrated
find my knowledge of vocabulary inadequate
find my knowledge of grammar inadequate
feel a sense that my study of English had helped
not be interested
write the words in Spanish
read the title and guess at the content
look for familiar words and guess at meaning
read each word one at a time
feel satisfied that I understand some
look at the endings on the words

If an NS of English were to speak to me, I would probably
try out what I've learned in English
understand most
try to speak back
avoid conversation
listen for key words
get frustrated
try to translate every word in my head
ask to slow down
listen to get the gist of what was being said to me
get embarrassed
feel satisfied that I can communicate
get the gist of what is said
feel a sense that my study of English had helped
try to hear all the verb endings
not be interested in having conversation
ask questions to help me understand

Perceived exposure to authentic texts

I have heard people conversing in English
I have read newspapers/magazines/ texts for native speakers of English
I have had native speakers speak to me

Demographic information

I began FL study in college
I have studied English in high school

I have travelled to an English-speaking country
I have lived in an English-speaking country
I have English-speaking friends
I use English outside the English class
I speak English at home
English is important for my formation
English is important for my future career