# Motivating Students With Humorous One-Point Videos

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Much of the literature and published research on L2 motivation has moved its focus from promoting motivation to avoiding demotivation. Some evidence appears quite convincing that teachers are responsible for demotivating learners, but learner-centered intrinsic motivation also needs to be considered. Keller's ARCS model was applied as a way to provide a systematic motivational design process to the construction and application of a humorous series of short, one-point English learning videos and online exercises. To evaluate the effectiveness of the series, a pilot survey containing eight questions was given to 14 students acting as testers. The results of the study show that 93% of the students enjoyed the activity and 86% reported experiencing positive learning outcomes from using the video series.

最新の第二言語学習者のモチベーションに関する先行研究の多くは、その焦点を学生のモチベーションを高めることから、モチベーションの低下を回避することに移行している。教員は学習者のモチベーションを下げる原因となりえるが、それのみではなく、学習者を主体とした、学習者本来のモチベーションを考慮する必要があるという研究結果は重要である。一連の短くシンプルでユーモラスな英語学習動画およびオンライン練習問題からなる本学習教材の構築および応用のために、体系的モチベーション向上のためのデザイン・プロセスを提供する方法としては、ケラーのARCSモデルを応用した。本教材の効果を測定するために、14人のテスター学生を対象に、本教材からの8つの問題を用いてパイロット調査をおこなったところ、93%の学生がその活動を楽しむと同時に、86%の学生が本教材から積極的な学習効果を経験したと解答した。

Demotivation negatively affects learner behavior, hinders autonomous thought, and leads to continuing low performance (Falout & Maruyama, 2004). Demotivated learners are "turned off" and often appear detached, disengaged, or ambivalent about learning. In an attempt to improve the low performance of such demotivated learners, a series of net-based humorous one-point videos and associated online exercises was developed to help activate EFL learning and improve basic English skills. The video series was constructed using a systematic motivational design process, John Keller's (1987) ARCS model, and its validity was tested in a pilot program, using a small number of learners who were asked to evaluate the program. Their feedback was analyzed and evaluated. The object of creating the series was to test the credibility and effectiveness of such a tool as an L2 motivator and ascertain whether such a methodology could genuinely motivate unenthusiastic or low performing students and promote positive learning outcomes.

## Motivation and the Teacher

Recently, much of the literature and published research on L2 motivation has moved its focus from promoting motivation to avoiding demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004, Falout & Falout, 2005, Dörnyei, 2001). This is summarized best by Christophel and Gorham (1995) who observed that motivation is most strongly affected not by what teachers do, but what they don't do, arguing that an absence of demotivators is much more effective in producing positive learning outcomes than the presence of motivators.

In SLA studies on motiovation, as Falout and Falout (2005) indicated, findings are corroborative, identifying the teacher as the major source and often the primary cause of demotivation. Dörnyei (2001) identified nine demotivating factors, claiming that teacher competence, commitment, personality, and teaching method are not only the most common causes of demotivation but are also responsible for 40% of the demotivation that students experience (p. 151). While Dörnyei's research has been largely conducted in Europe, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) reiterated this finding in a Japanese context, indicating two consistently top-ranking attributes were "teachers' classes being boring or monotonous" (p. 60). Potee (2002) also reported similar findings in Japan, just as Millette and Gorham (2002) and Kearney, Plax, and Allen (2002) identified the same tendency within a North American context, noting that displeasing or unpleasant teacher behaviors or personalities were among the highest causes of demotivation. Other demotivating behaviors that emanate from the teacher have been identified in various studies, such as overly pedantic behavior and ridicule (Arai, 2004), anger at questions and blaming students for lack of understanding (Falout & Maruyama, 2004), preferential treatment (Dörnyei, 2001) and a lack of competence, preparation, or enthusiasm (Falout & Falout, 2005). This was further reiterated in survey findings presented by Falout, Murphey, Elwood, and Hood (2008), who noted that students identified the teacher as the major thing they did not like or found unhelpful in both high school and junior high school grammar translation classes.

## Motivation and the Learner

The evidence seems fairly overwhelming that teachers are responsible for demotivating learners, albeit unintentionally. However, both Dörnyei (1998) and Falout and Falout (2005) identified reduced self-confidence in learners as a major significant factor in demotivation. Falout and Falout also suggested that the earlier learners are subjected to demotivators, the less likely the learners will be able to control their affective states, leading to what Sosa and Casanave (2007) described as learners who are "out of reach, disengaged, or uninvolved" (p. 240). As Falout, Stillwell, and Murphey (2012) indicated, this in turn can demotivate teachers in their professional practices, leading to a potentially vicious circle in which they become demotivated by unenthusiastic learners who lack "motivation, interest, (or) purpose" (Sosa & Casanave, 2007, p. 240), thereby perpetuating the same negative behavior from all participants.

## Increasing Motivation

As Hasegawa (2004) reported, language learning failure is considered to be highly related to demotivation, but the source is not always the teacher. There are other causes. Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009) divided demotivating factors into three categories, classified as external (of the learning environment), internal (of the learner), or reactive behaviors (to the demotivation process). They added that less proficient learners have more difficulty in controlling their affective states to cope with demotivating experiences. However, such demotivation could easily come from sources other than the teacher, such as lesson material and format, learning experience design, or difficulty level, in addition to other external or internal factors.

An activated, dynamic, motivated teacher does not guarantee a motivated and motivating learning experience. Consider the case of the learner who just doesn't "get it." The learner may become demotivated or feel incompetent from being unable to complete a task or grasp a concept, despite the teacher's best motivating efforts. Also, decreasing demotivators to improve learning outcomes, as recommended by Christophel and Gorham (1995) may not be an easy task. Increasing motivators may be more realistic.

Studies such as those by Yair (2000) indicated that learners are more likely to be engaged in the learning process when they are actively involved and given some investment (choice and control) in the learning process. Furthermore, Ushioda (1998) found that demotivated learners were able to maintain their learning by circumventing perceived demotivators and adopting motivational strategies to encourage their own motivation. Reversing demotivation should thus not only focus on reducing teacher-centered demotivators but also on increasing motivators.

For this reason, Keller's (1987) ARCS model was adopted as a way to provide a systematic motivational design process. The ARCS model, an acronym from the first letters of the words ***a**ttention*, ***r**elevance*, ***c**onfidence* and ***s**atisfaction*, offers a problem-solving approach to designing motivational aspects of learning environments, with each stage suggesting how to stimulate and maintain students' motivation to learn. In other words, if the subject material or teaching method is perceived to be interesting or valuable, the learner will be more likely to pay *attention* to what is being taught. Similarly, if the content is perceived as *relevant*, the learner will be more motivated to learn and continue learning. This in turn leads to *confidence* as the learner comes to realize that success in both learning and understanding the new content is possible, ultimately resulting in *satisfaction*. The learner prevails by being able to successfully achieve the originally desired goal, and the process, being both cyclic and self-reinforcing, engenders further motivation to learn and succeed, with much of the responsibility for engendering motivation and decreasing demotivation being moved from the teacher to the learner.

## The ARCS Model: A Model to Motivate Learners

Recognizing the value of the systematic reinforcement process in Keller's model, it was decided to test the viability of using video-based language learning within the ARCS framework. The elements of humor, brevity, simplicity, and a visual aspect all appeared to fit well within what could be accomplished using the model, allowing the design and creation of a platform to teach basic English through humorous one-point videos (see Figure 1).

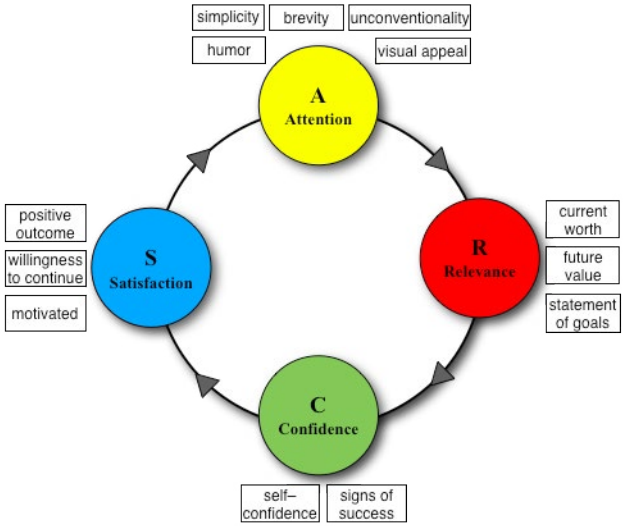


Figure 1. Motivational Aspects of Keller's ARCS Model When Applied to Short Movies

The first and most important component of the ARCS model is gaining and maintaining the learner's attention. In our model, attention is gained by using five features: humor, visual appeal, brevity, simplicity, and unconventionality. There are reasons for these choices. Foremost, humor is not only appealing and attention grabbing but has been shown to facilitate learning in subjects perceived by students as difficult (Kher, Moslstad, & Donahue, 1999), in addition to encouraging the retention of new information (Torok, McMorris, & Lin, 2004), and increasing learning speed (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). Visual appeal promotes attention by its very nature; watching movies is generally more fun than listening to a teacher. One of Keller's (2008) strategies for gaining attention included sensory stimuli; he claimed that incorporating visual media into the learning experience makes the learner more attentive (pp. 176-177). This, along with a recent British survey that found university students have an average attention span of only 10 minutes (Richardson, 2010), explains why the videos in our series are limited to 3 minutes or less in length. They are also simple, teaching only one basic point. Avoiding complexity reduces the likelihood of frustration for the learner, which helps ensure satisfaction. Finally, just as Keller (2008) stressed the importance of variability in achieving satisfaction, an attempt is made to capture attention by being unorthodox. The format of the videos is unconventional. There are no actors—just paper, pens, and hastily drawn images filmed using an overhead camera. The story of each video follows the adventures of a character drawn on paper.

If learners perceive the second component, relevance, in what they are studying, motivation will increase. As Shepherd (2009) observed, linking learning experiences with desirable outcomes, especially in terms of current worth and future value, is important for demonstrating relevance. A university student might, for example, associate better English ability with a greater chance of gaining employment. A list of goal-oriented statements and objectives will also help the learner to see progress. Our series uses simple titles for each movie and exercise, clearly showing the learner the target language focus, or the goal for that lesson. The associated follow-up exercises allow further practice of the lesson point, both demonstrating the relevance of the exercise itself and reinforcing the learning experience.

Likewise, confidence is gained as learners sense some ability to understand the content of the short movies and increases as learners are able to succeed at extension exercises. Every video begins with a very simple one-point English lesson that is both short and easy to understand. The extension exercises are initially very simple and enable the learner to build confidence by attaining the correct answer. The problems gradually become more difficult, extending the student and reinforcing new understanding.

Finally, satisfaction results when learners find they are able to complete a given task (Keller, 2008, p.177). If an activity is satisfying, the learner is more willing to repeat it. The aim is to pique attention with a short, entertaining, unconventional movie in which a comic figure explains a simple English language point. The learner may realize that English is not as difficult as he or she had thought, and that English proficiency might be attainable. In this way, if the learner can successfully understand the movie content and complete the online exercises, it is hoped that confidence will increase, which will satisfy the learner and likely inspire him or her to continue studying in that area.

## Short Movies as Motivators

The video series was developed in an attempt to help low proficiency, non-English major university students who demonstrated difficulty or poor motivation in learning English. As noted by Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009), less proficient learners have more difficulty in controlling their affective states to cope with

demotivating experiences, leading to many learners developing and harboring a negative attitude toward English language study.

If, as the literature maintains, the teacher is a major source of the demotivation, and if there is minimal change in teacher behavior, continued study in a conventional manner using traditional methodology and orthodox materials seems likely to perpetuate the same demotivating effects and poor results. Accepting Gee's (2003) assertion that learning won't occur without motivation and Prensky's (2001) resolute belief that the challenge of the educator is to engage "digital native" students via their technology, the use of short, relevant, one-point videos and associated online exercises to help in teaching basic English skills seemed like a valid and appropriate way to successfully motivate and engage learners. Such an approach offers a viable alternative by employing different techniques and strategies to motivate the student.

## The Zombie Guy Series

The name of the short video series is *Zombie Guy* and it was chosen due to the prevalence of zombies in popular culture. Movies using a cat or dog could just as easily have been made, but it seemed they would not have the same impact as zombies. The unusual characteristics of zombies affords the opportunity to include some unexpected levity in presenting language structures; for example, Zombie Guy looks at a hacked-off leg to illustrate the sentence *I love meat* (see Figure 2). Visual and verbal humor, along with an unorthodox delivery method, help make the character and the key sentences memorable in a fun, informal way. The goal is to give turned-off students a back door to English, to compensate for negative experiences or poor performances in the past, and to provide learners with a second chance to understand and succeed in what may have been a disliked, written-off subject.

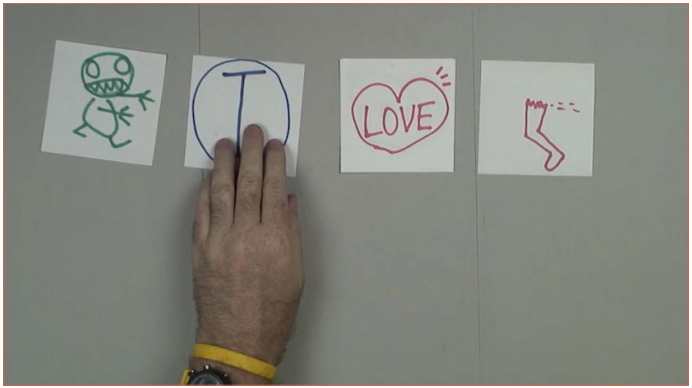


Figure 2. Infographic Representation of I Love Meat. (The main character, Zombie Guy, is on the left.)

## Features of Zombie Guy

The *Zombie Guy* series is designed to be appealing due to its humorous, unconventional themes, its compactness, and its delivery method. Using Keller's ARCS model, it is devised to produce positive learning experiences and motivate learners to continue learning.

The website (ochimusha.com) where both the movies and exercises are located is called the *Zombie Guy Diary*. The learner proceeds to the page and logs in; a unique record is kept for each user. Then the learner can click on the "day" of the diary that he or she wishes to study. Each day presents a theme or learning objective, usually with a suitably zombie-like title. For example, if learners click on *Day Three—They fight monsters*, they are taken to the video and related exercises (in this case presenting the third person plural). After watching the video, the learner can choose to either complete the extension questions online or download and print out a PDF version.

The online exercises test three different skills. The first exercise checks the learner's understanding of the word order, the second checks the learner's ability to translate a simple Japanese sentence into English, and the third is a multiple-choice problem. (See Appendix A for the PDF exercise from *Day One*.)

The online version is more effective as a motivator as it is self-correcting, calculates scores, and also contains an algorithm to display a *smile factor*—the degree of pleasure indicated on the face of a green monster, located at the end of each exercise. This smile factor is based on the respondent's answers, serving as an additional motivational feature. Faces range from a wide smile to expressions of various degrees of distress (see Appendix B). The PDF version does not contain this motivational feature. (See Table 1 for a comparison of features.)

Table 1. Comparison of Student Exercise Formats and Functions of *Zombie Guy*

| Functions | Online Exercises | PDF Exercises |
|---|---|---|
| Self-correcting | Yes | No |
| Automatic grading | Yes | No |
| Smile factor | Yes | No |
| All exercises | Yes | Yes |
| Printable | No | Yes |
| Downloadable | No | Yes |

## Student Feedback

To evaluate the effectiveness of the series, a pilot survey containing eight questions was given to 14 students who were testers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to confirm that both the process and material were not just amusing, but also motivating and educational. The questions were designed to test these objectives (see Table 2).

Table 2. Survey Questions and Items Being Tested for

| No. | Question | Testing for |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | I have learnt something new. | Awareness of positive learning outcome |
| 2 | I would like to continue learning this way. | Acceptance of ***relevance*** |
| 3 | The length of the movies is appropriate. | Ability to understand content of short movie |
| 4 | The online exercises are easy to understand. | Willingness to undertake online exercises |
| 5 | I feel more confident constructing English sentences. | ***Confidence*** gained through understanding |
| 6 | I enjoyed this activity. | ***Satisfaction*** from perceived ability to succeed |
| 7 | Zombie Guy is cool! | Gaining and maintaining ***attention*** |
| 8 | I prefer regular classroom teaching. | Willingness to try unorthodox learning |

In particular, questions 7, 2, 5 and 6 focus on the necessary requirements for motivation to occur, as specified in Keller's ARCS model. That is, they are testing for the learner's *attention*

being piqued, an acceptance of the *relevance* of the material, a showing of *confidence* brought by understanding, and a statement of *satisfaction* from the perception of likely success.

The survey itself was presented with a 4-point Likert scale, with respondents given the choice to *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. As Clason and Dormody (1994) advised, neutral choice was specifically and intentionally excluded from the scale. A neutral response is often interpreted as a *don't know* response, which is quite different to a *neither agree nor disagree*. It has also been noted that such factors as fatigue, reticence, uncertainty or ambivalence can lead to an over abundance of neutral responses (Schuman & Presser, 1996). The results can be seen below in Table 3.

### Table 3. Student Responses to Survey (*N* = 14)

| No. | Question | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I have learnt something new. | 6 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| 2 | I would like to continue learning this way. | 4 | 9 | 1 | 0 |
| 3 | The length of the movies is appropriate. | 8 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | The online exercises are easy to understand. | 4 | 8 | 1 | 1 |
| 5 | I feel more confident constructing English sentences. | 5 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| 6 | I enjoyed this activity. | 5 | 8 | 1 | 0 |
| 7 | Zombie Guy is cool! | 7 | 6 | 1 | 0 |
| 8 | I prefer regular classroom teaching. * | 0 | 1 | 8 | 4 |

*Note.* * One student did not answer this question.

As can be seen, the bulk of the responses seem to agree or strongly agree with the propositions, with the exception of question 8, which was a transposed question. In this case, the majority disagrees with the proposition.

From the survey, it can be seen that most students acting as pilot testers (86%) felt they had learnt something (Q1). Most (93%) also noted a desire to continue learning this way (Q2). All students thought the movie length was appropriate, validating our belief that short activities capitalize on short attention spans (Q3). Fourteen percent of students did not like the online exercise format, and found it difficult to understand (Q4). That may be due to a lack of confidence with spelling or keyboard typing. Most students (86%) felt they had obtained a grasp of basic sentence construction and felt comfortable making sentences (Q5). All but one student (93%) enjoyed the activity (Q6), and the same number also liked Zombie Guy (Q7). Besides being descriptor testers for the ARCS model, the purpose of questions 6 and 7 was also to differentiate student feeling concerning the learning as opposed to the character, Zombie Guy. No student strongly preferred regular classroom teaching (Q8), and 86% strongly disagreed with the proposition that classroom teaching is preferable. The responses indicate that the format and content are an appropriate learning vehicle and are effective as motivators.

## Discussion

Not only avoiding demotivation but also increasing motivation improves the learning process. As indicated by Schmidt (1990) and Sharwood-Smith (1994), learning is only that part of the *input* that the learner *intakes*. If the learner has no intake, learning will likely not occur. Despite the demotivating effects that the teacher may have on the learner, if the learner can successfully be motivated to intake at least some of the input, learning will occur. In other words, applying well thought out teaching

material and learning content to a systematic motivational design process results in a higher intake and a positive result for the learner. Capturing the attention of the student with an interesting approach, showing the relevancy of the material, and promoting confidence through appropriate design and reinforcement activities all lead to satisfaction, which motivates the student and increases learning.

## Conclusion

As the use of technology in English education continues to increase, so will the demand for innovative and creative implementations using the new technologies. As shown by the survey results, the humorous one-point video series presented here successfully demonstrates a systematic way to motivate low performance EFL learners. Plans are to continue the Zombie Guy project until a large bank of short videos targeting basic English skills has been created. A more detailed questionnaire with a larger sample will be undertaken upon completion.

## Bio Data

**Simon Thollar** is a full-time teacher at Hokkaido Information University, Ebetsu, Hokkaido, Japan. His research interests include learner L2 motivation, e-learning and active learning. He can be contacted at <simon@do-johodai.ac.jp>

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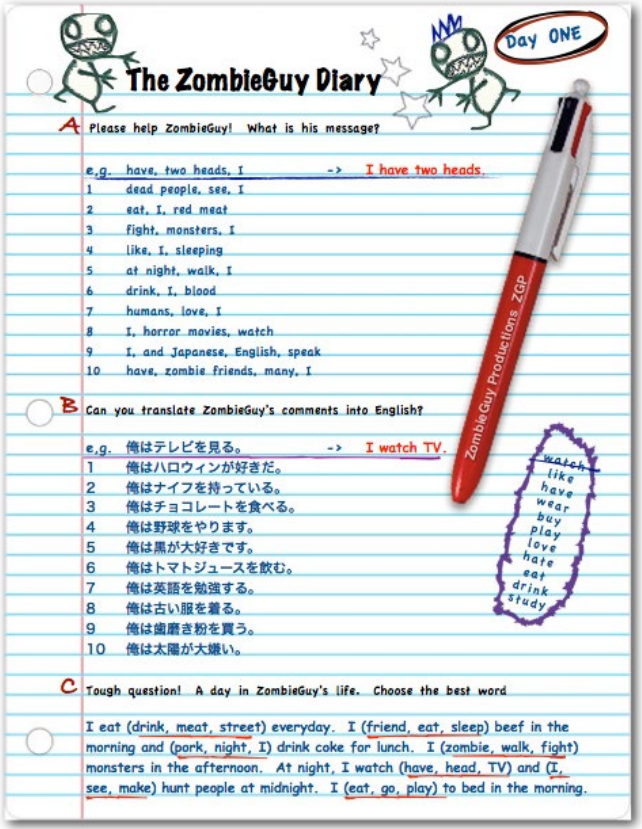
## Appendix A

### *Sample Zombie Guy PDF Exercise*

Example of the 3 sets of exercises from lesson 1 of Zombie Guy. The example is taken from the pdf download.




## Appendix B

### *Sample Zombie Guy Online Exercise*

Screenshot of online exercise showing problems and monster's face indicating degrees of happiness or distress according to the answer.