

Language Learning Motivation in Japan

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Language Learning Motivation in Japan

Edited by

**Matthew T. Apple, Dexter Da Silva
and Terry Fellner**

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Preface

A generation ago English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, student-teachers and teachers were faced with a yawning gap in the area of student motivation between theory and research on the one hand and practice on the other. EFL motivational theory and research were dominated by the Gardnerian tradition (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), while teachers seemed to view motivation as a mysterious, magical intangible phenomenon (Bagnole, 1993) unrelated to theory and research. One of the main challenges and achievements in this field for the past two to three decades has been to bridge that gap. The explosion of research has also helped to bridge other gaps that have existed in the field: that between EFL motivational theory and general educational psychology theory and that between the inner circle dominated/driven academic theory and outer circle classroom practice.

The field of EFL motivational research has clearly rapidly progressed and matured into a multi-faceted, dynamic one, where the present generation of teachers is now faced with a wide variety of motivational models and constructs, developed using different methods in very different contexts. It may sometimes be confusing or overwhelming, but teachers are now able to make clear connections with their experience in the classroom and the existing theoretical constructs and research results.

Our intention for this volume was simple: to pull together the cutting edge EFL motivational research occurring in Japan. Despite being very aware of the current research field, it was nevertheless an eye-opening process. By focusing on Japan we were recognizing the importance of the cultural context and the situated approach. A basic part of this context is that English is by far the dominant foreign language of study in Japan. English is mandatory at all levels of education in Japan, from elementary to doctoral. Government data also show that over 90% of those actively studying foreign languages are studying English (METI, 2005), and business reports indicate a growing need for Japanese professionals to improve their English language skills to cope with globalization of the world market (Yano Research Institute, 2012).

The focus on Japan also set certain limits. However, the variety of educational contexts and theoretical approaches gathered dissolve these limits. The chapters in this volume examine the proposed theories using Structural Equation Modeling, case studies, ethnographic evidence and diary studies as well as several mixed studies. We believe that the volume succeeds in delivering a broad canvas on which the details of the specific situations are described, analyzed and discussed, to novice and experienced readers within and outside of the Japanese context.

Ema Ushioda, from her unique perspective, provides the book with the perfect introduction. She covers the theoretical, empirical and educational perspectives of recent and current L2 Motivational research, as well as providing the background to English Language Education in Japan and the meaning of English for students. Yoshiyuki Nakata's final chapter serves to both summarize the important issues in L2 motivation and the Japanese school context, and to suggest ways forward for future L2 motivation research, especially in Japan.

In between these bookends, the volume is not intended to be read from start to finish. Individual chapters are designed to be read on their own, without the need for knowledge of previous chapters. However, references to other chapters are included to help the reader find connections with other chapters.

Matthew Apple
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Terry Fellner

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1 Foreign Language Motivation Research in Japan: An 'Insider' Perspective from Outside Japan

Ema Ushioda

In this paper, I would like to develop an evaluative commentary on foreign language motivation research in Japan, in my capacity as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. In terms of academic credentials, my insider status stems from the fact that I have been 'inside' the L2 motivation field since my doctoral studies in the early 1990s. Most of my research and publication work over the past 20 years has focused on language learning motivation and associated issues of learner autonomy and language pedagogy (e.g. Ushioda, 1996, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011). From a professional perspective, my insider status stems from the fact that most of my language teaching experience in the decade before I began my doctoral research was with Japanese students of English, both in Japan and in the UK. From a personal, linguistic and cultural perspective, my insider status stems from the fact that I am ethnically Japanese, born of Japanese parents, with whom I continue to interact mostly through Japanese rather than English. At the same time, however, my perspective on foreign language motivation research in Japan is that of someone born and educated outside Japan – namely, in Ireland – and based since 2002 in a UK academic environment. Japan is not geographically 'home' for me, and I have spent only three years of my life living there, as a language teacher in the 1980s.

So with my insider perspective from outside Japan, my purpose is to offer an evaluative commentary on foreign language motivation research in Japan. As evidenced by the range of papers in this volume, foreign language motivation is a major research topic in Japan. It is interesting to consider why this may be so and to evaluate how this body of research in Japan connects with and contributes to the broader field of research on language learning motivation outside Japan. I will begin by considering this wider

international field and discuss possible reasons for the current growth of interest in L2 motivation in general. I will then focus on the Japanese context and explore three key areas of inquiry in foreign language motivation research in this context. I will evaluate the empirical, theoretical and pedagogical insights deriving from this body of work, and position these in relation to current broader developments in the field of L2 motivation research. In doing so, I will show how foreign language motivation research in Japan is contributing in no small measure to advancing current thinking in the field, and I will highlight the importance of localized understandings of L2 motivation in shaping theory and classroom practice.

L2 Motivation in the New Millennium: A Vibrant Field of Research

Before we consider why foreign language motivation is currently a major research topic in Japan, it is important to take a step outside Japan and ask a broader question: Why is L2 motivation research such a vibrant research field right now in general? For there is no doubt that it is, as evidenced in the surge of L2 motivation studies and papers published since the turn of the millennium, and continuing to be submitted to international and local refereed journals across the globe. More particularly, within the last few years, several book-length publications on L2 motivation have appeared. These include two research monographs by Nakata (2006) and Gu (2009) and two volumes of conceptual and empirical papers edited by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) and Murray *et al.* (2011), respectively. Across these two edited volumes, there are as many as 39 L2 motivation researchers represented, hailing from different parts of the world. To this I should add that I have just edited another volume of papers on international perspectives on motivation in English language teaching (Ushioda, 2013a). In short, within the space of just a few years since 2009, the field of foreign language motivation research will have generated three substantial collections of papers. Prior to this, the most recent anthology of L2 motivation studies dates back to just after the turn of the millennium (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001). It is clear that L2 motivation research across the globe has become much more vibrant within the last few years, as attested to by the publication of these new collections of studies as well as journal articles, and by the growing popularity of motivation-themed conferences in the language education field. This begs the question: why are we so interested in foreign language motivation these days?

Of course it is difficult to specify the exact reasons for this recent surge in interest in L2 motivation across the globe. Undoubtedly, however, what seems key to the analysis is the nature of this global context – or more

specifically, the impact of globalization and global English on all aspects of our lives, including language learning and education. For if we ask ourselves what recent debates within the L2 motivation field have centered on and what has provoked these debates, it is unquestionably the impact of globalization and the dominant status of English.

Theoretical and empirical perspectives

At a theoretical level, these debates have revolved around questioning the continued relevance or value of the traditional social-psychological concept of integrative motivation, which is defined in its strong form as identification with and a desire to integrate into the target language community (Gardner, 2001). As I have discussed elsewhere (Ushioda, 2011), recent thinking is that the notion of integrating with a target language community loses explanatory power when we talk about motivation for learning English (a) when English is fast becoming a ‘must-have’ basic educational skill (e.g. Graddol, 2006); (b) when there is no clearly defined target language community (UK? US? The world?) into which learners of English are motivated to ‘integrate’; and (c) when physical geographical boundaries separating communities of language users become dissolved in the world of cyberspace and online communication networks. Since we are referring to a global community of English language users, does it make sense to conceptualize it as an ‘external’ reference group, or should we think of it more as part of one’s internal representation of oneself as a *de facto* member of this global community? This line of thinking has led us to reconceptualize L2 motivation in terms of what Dörnyei and Csizér (2002: 453) call an ‘internal process of identification within the self-concept’, rather than identification with an external reference group or community. In other words, language learning motivation becomes closely associated with concepts of self and identity, as reflected in the titles of the recently edited volumes *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) and *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning* (Murray *et al.*, 2011).

In short, from a conceptual and research perspective, the impact of globalization and global English on foreign language motivation is providing a richly fertile ground for theoretical analysis and empirical inquiry, as we develop new self-related and identity-related conceptualizations of L2 motivation and seek to validate these new constructs.

Pedagogical and educational perspectives

On the other hand, if we look beyond theoretical and empirical issues and consider instead the impact of globalization and global English on more practical pedagogical and educational concerns, this is where much of the