

Book Review

Language Learning Motivation in Japan

Matthew T. Apple, Dexter Da Silva, and Terry Fellner (Eds.). Multilingual Matters, 2013. 344 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78309-049-5

Reviewed by:

Kevin W. H. Yung

Centre for Applied English Studies, The University of Hong Kong

Language Learning Motivation in Japan is likely to appeal to readers of this journal because it examines the recent development of second language (L2) motivational research in an Asian context. Despite its contextualised nature, the book offers implications that are transferrable to different regions where English is taught and learnt as an L2 or a foreign language (EFL).

The intention for this volume was “to pull together the cutting edge EFL motivational research occurring in Japan” (p. xi) which it does through 17 chapters covering a wide range of relevant topics and various motivational theories. In Chapter 1, Ema Ushioda, in a comprehensive review of recent literature on EFL learning motivation, convincingly calls for the reconceptualization of motivation constructs with the notions of self and identity because of the impact of globalisation on English learning. This chapter successfully prepares readers to engage in theoretical discussions of research findings. Chapters 2 and 3 by Kimberly A. Noels and Tomoko Yashima respectively also offer insight into the relationships between motivation and other constructs such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, international posture and willingness to communicate. These chapters provide readers with theoretical foundation and important aspects of L2 motivational research for understanding the findings in later chapters.

The remainder of this volume presents classroom-based research and a wide range of methodologies. Quantitatively, for example, Matthew T. Apple, Joseph Falout and Glen Hill (Chapter 4) investigate the relationships between various classroom-based constructs and Dörnyei’s (2005) L2 Motivational Self System among a sample of Science and Engineering university students using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). It confirms Dörnyei’s Self System as a salient theoretical framework in L2 motivational research, and its specific context offers pedagogical implications for university teachers of English for specific purposes. Rieko Nishida (Chapter 6) reveals interesting, although perhaps not unpredictable, differences between males and females, and between young and older EFL learners. Later chapters such as those by J. Lake (Chapter 13), Joseph Falout, Yoshifumi Fukada, Tim Murphey and Tetsuya Fukada (Chapter 14), and Ryo Nitta (Chapter 15) explore learner motivation through questionnaire surveys and address its relationship with different areas, including positive psychology, group interactions, and dynamic systems. These quantitative studies paint a broad picture of motivation among a wider population of Japanese EFL

learners at different education levels. The studies tend to confirm, rather than add to, existing knowledge in L2 motivation.

Other chapters in this volume adopt a qualitative and a mix-methods approach. For instance, Chapter 5 by Hideo Hayashi and Chapter 7 by Kay Irie and Damon R. Brewster were based on stories from two to three EFL university learners and show the importance of balancing international posture and positive attitudes toward the learning situation and the power of Ideal L2 Self in the learning process. While those stories are representative of learners in EFL contexts, the findings are somewhat predictable.

An interesting example of a mixed-methods study is that of Tatsuya Taguchi (Chapter 10) who found that Japanese university students generally develop their Ideal L2 Self on personally agreeable aspects such as using English for communication in class, but the Ideal L2 Self becomes weak when they perceive classroom activities irrelevant to their study and work. While this finding is not new, the study addressed the under-researched component of L2 Learning Experience in the L2 Motivational Self System and offers implications for further investigation.

The chapters in this volume offer a number of pedagogical implications. Keita Kikuchi (Chapter 12) suggests teachers should avoid such demotivating behaviours as incompetence, offensiveness and indolence while other chapters encourage the development of learners' Ideal L2 Self as an effective motivational self-guide. All these implications, while perhaps not offering any surprises to readers, are in line with those recommended in other recent L2 motivational research.

It would have been good to see more attention paid in this volume to the role of shadow education. Chapter 7 includes the narration of a learner's experience at cram school and its role in L2 learner motivation but this could have been investigated more deeply both in that study and others because the phenomenon is prevalent in Japan and many other Asian countries (see, for example, Allen, 2016; Yung, 2015).

This volume consists of chapters with a variety of insightful topics that could have been better connected and organised. Although the editors state the book is a compendium and cross-references between chapters are provided, a synopsis giving an overview of the book and highlighting the relationships of different chapters would have provided greater overall cohesion. The book could have been organised into sections according to methodologies, theories or types of learners. While the volume lacks structure and the findings reported in some of the chapters are somewhat predictable and unsurprising, the book offers contextualised confirmation of research findings from elsewhere as well as useful theoretical and practical implications for further research in EFL motivation and classroom practices that are not only relevant to Japan but also transferrable elsewhere.

References:

- Allen, D. (2016). Japanese cram schools and entrance exam washback. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 54-67. Retrieved from <http://www3.caes.hku.hk/ajal/index.php/ajal/article/view/338>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Yung, K. W. H. (2015). Learning English in the shadows: Understanding Chinese learners' experiences of private tutoring. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(4), 707-732. doi: 10.1002/tesq.193