



## IDENTITY, MOTIVATION, AND AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Editors: Garold Murray, Xuesong Gao and Terry Lamb

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Identity, Motivation, and Autonomy in Language Learning is a collection of short theory and research articles discussing exactly what the title suggests. According to the authors, much of the literature in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research focuses on the aforementioned elements as isolated aspects. The authors in this volume desire to illustrate how looking at the convergence of these elements can potentially unify a fractious research agenda and help us better understand their interrelated nature in the process of language learning.

The book is broken up into 3 sections: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives, Independent Learning Settings, and Cultures and Contexts. The first section is meant to provide differing theoretical perspectives that could be used to further explore the links between identity, motivation, and autonomy. The remaining two sections provide empirical research. Section two focuses primarily on isolating learning contexts such as self-access study centers and distance learning with one chapter on the teachers' perspectives on autonomy. The third section takes some in-depth looks into particular cultural contexts.

The opening chapter in section one is written by Ema Ushioda. Her paper in this book, "Motivating Learners to Speak as Themselves", as well as her previous works, are cited by almost every single subsequent author and clearly provide a solid grounding for the collection. One of Ushioda's central themes, and a recurring theme throughout this volume, is the need to start looking at learners as individuals situated within their own unique contexts rather than as generalized typologies of learners. In her words, "if our pedagogical concern is to engage the motivation of particular learners, then we need a theoretical perspective that addresses its uniquely personal and contextually grounded nature." (pg. 12) Ushioda goes on to say that much previous SLA research has viewed motivation as an achievement or product stimulated by classroom techniques and urges and approach that allows learners to "speak as themselves."

All the research that follows takes this idea of learners speaking for themselves in particular contexts as a jumping off point. Within this volume, you will find little in the way of large quantitative data analyses that lead us to generalizable conclusions. Instead you will find extended discussions based around qualitative studies with small numbers of learners or teachers in a particular context gleaned from narrative histories, learning journals, questionnaires, and interviews.

The rest of part one focuses on the integration of various research directions that were previously studied as stand-alone topics. Chapters 4 and 5 in particular focus on a somewhat recent trend in the field of SLA, applying concepts within complexity and chaos theory to better understand the interconnected nature of SLA systems.

As an example of this Sade (Chapter 4) and Paiva (Chapter 5) claim that individual and social motivation are generally viewed as split but should be viewed as an integrated system. Also in this vein, Sade states that, "in complexity theory the context is seen as part of the system rather than merely as a background on which the action is enacted" ( pg. 43) Indeed, this sentiment is later echoed by Malcolm who notes that it is perhaps prudent for teachers to be more aware of what's happening in the lives of their learners outside the classroom than within it (pg. 199).

The general goals of both Sade and Paiva are to show how identity, motivation, and autonomy are interrelated aspects of a holistic system. Two key points picked up on by others in this volume are 1) the social environment or cultural context of the learners has as much influence as the teachers or even the learners themselves and 2) using the analogy of the butterfly effect, the sensitivity of language learning to initial conditions may have wide-reaching repercussions for the learner. These points are illustrated quite well in a number of the chapters in this book. For example, a medical student in the Gulf that was motivated to improve his English after failing a course (pg. 200-201) and whose family later encouraged his further study (pg. 203) or a house wife who became motivated to improve because of a small comment her husband made about shopping in Hawaii (pg. 67).

In parts 2 and 3, Dornyei's theory of the L2 Self is often cited, especially in relation to future perceived selves or imagined communities. Parts 2 and 3 also have some interesting chapters on rather neglected areas of research such as plurilingualism, self-access learning centers, and the perspectives on teachers and its influence on their learners' motivation.

For the SLA researcher, this volume opens up a number of lines of inquiry that are ripe for future research and discussion such as the exact nature of the interplay between identity, motivation, and autonomy, the effects teachers' perceptions of these subjects have on the learners themselves, the specific techniques a teacher can employ to increase learner motivation along with just how much influence they can expect to have, and how various identities interact with each other to bolster motivation and autonomy.

Ironically, despite many of the authors' claims for the need of a narrow approach focusing on individual learners in a specific time and place, there was still a tendency by some to make sweeping statements based on small, subjective collections of data presented within the book. A prime example of this comes from Murray (Chapter 6) when he says, "The experiences of the learners in this study suggest that bilingual teachers who share the learners' first language and culture can positively influence learners' self-efficacies as well as inspire the development of ideal L2 selves by serving as models. This calls into question current thinking and practice in Japan and other parts of the world, which place a high value on English classes being taught by so-called 'native' English speakers" (p. 86). This chapter focused primarily on the experiences of three learners, from which a few excerpts were quoted from interviews or the learners own writings. If we are to truly accept the belief that it's important to look at a learner in context, thereby not generalizing them into types, then it logically follows that we can make no real firm conclusions based on research conducted in this way. How a few excerpts from the lives of three learners can "suggest" or "call into question current thinking and practice in Japan and other parts of the world" remain open for debate.

Overall, this collection offers some valuable insights into lesser known or emerging areas of SLA research. Each chapter is clearly written, and new terminology and past theoretical perspectives are explained, making it accessible to novice researchers or classroom teachers interested in exploring beyond initial training. The chapters are short and do a fair job of introducing the reader to the research and ideas presented within, but, due to space constraints, do not provide much in the way of in-depth analysis. For this reason, this book, grounded in a humanistic tradition, serves as a good introduction to a more integrative or holistic approach to identity, motivation and autonomy.



**Biodata**

Nick Jaworski has over 6 years experience in EFL teaching, training, and management in Turkey and China. He is currently a Language Learning Director in Shanghai. He blogs about ELT at <http://TurkishTEFL.com> and can be found on Twitter @TurkishTEFL