
Book Review

Elegance and Elephants in the Room of *Language Learning Motivation in Japan*

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

Reviewed by Peter A. Edwards
Kansai Gaidai University

The perspectives in this review hold willingness to communicate and classroom/social dynamics as pivotal to language learning, and the goal of “actionalizing theory” as indispensable. The struggle to write a review of *Language Learning Motivation in Japan* (LLMJ) comes neither from the text as a whole, nor concerning its individual 17 chapters, which are all well-written, well-meaning, and often elegantly insightful. Instead, beginning with the book’s title, a challenge arises in determining what room it hopes to occupy in which school of thought and purpose. In other words, what is the motivation behind this book about motivation?

Of course this difficulty does not completely escape the authors, and towards the end of the opening chapter, Ema Ushioda questions the motivation behind the book, and shrewdly points out:

(I)f our work in foreign language motivation research does not lead to helping the very people who are engaged in language learning, then we may

well ask what useful purpose our research serves beyond our own academic interests and our need to publish. (p. 13)

Precisely! This quote uses the word *research*, in reference to language learning motivation, however the title of the book does not, and this could perhaps mislead some readers to think that this volume explicitly and extensively discusses *how to* motivate Japanese language learners, which LLMJ does not.

Would-be readers primarily motivated to better understand the history and current trends in *researching* language learning motivation, and those with a specific interest in the Japanese context for such research, will not be disappointed with this fine assembly of chapters. This review will highlight a few of the possible motivations readers may have to pick up such a collection, in light of the gems they will find. Also a brief discussion will mention this reviewer's perspective based on experiences as a teacher, researcher, and administrator, as to what LLMJ and the field of motivation have not yet emphasized enough: the impact of the L1 audience on the fluctuating motivation of L2 learners.

The preface to LLMJ states that the first and last chapters take the roles of "bookends" which respectively introduce and then summarize the other 15 chapters, which need not be read in any particular order. That said, Hideo Hadashi's chapter 5, "Dual Goal Orientation in the Japanese Context: A Case Study of Two EFL Learners" provides an admirable introduction into the daunting world of motivation and the Japanese context, while looking at a small case without unnerving statistics. Interested readers may then want to dart around the chapters and will quickly find recurring themes. Although perhaps convenient for getting familiar with current researchers, readers of LLMJ will discern a somewhat incestuous flavor in that reference lists resemble, and even chapters often refer to each other.

Though not a contributor to this volume, Zoltán Dörnyei's landmark motivational self system and other of his publications make appearances in every LLMJ chapter, painting a picture of understandable dominance but perhaps also dependence on one particular perspective. That is not to say that Dörnyei's system is never challenged. For example, Lake's chapter 13, "Positive L2 Self: Linking

Positive Psychology with L2 Motivation”, not only offers a fine list of references for the field of psychology, but also notes that Dörnyei’s “ought-to” self in the context of Japan may actually be linked to a phenomenon known in Japanese as *kiki komori*, or self-seclusion due to anxiety caused by learners stressfully striving for an unreachable perfectionism they feel they *ought to* achieve.

Several other Japanese terms emerge from the chapters that may be useful to readers entering the Japanese world as teachers, researchers, administrators, or otherwise curious visitors, who want to learn some of the local lingo and become acquainted with some of the country’s unique and impactful contextual characteristics.

Ushioda’s chapter 1 includes three important Japanese terms: *sakoku* (Japan’s historic self-imposed isolation), *koku saika* (desired internationalization), and *junken eigo* (English specifically or only for exams). Together these concepts frame some of the puzzle the later chapters attempt to piece together. For example: How does a culture that historically eschewed the outside world now seek globalization with old-style teaching methodology?

Falout et al. in chapter 14, “What’s Working in Japan? Present Communities of Imagination”, also point to *issei gakusuu* (learning through lecture-style teaching) as a common but increasingly unpopular way of approaching English learning. Adding to this puzzle, Yashima in chapter 3, “Imagined L2 Selves and Motivation for Intercultural Communication”, mentions a growing counter-phenomenon, *uchimuki* (lack of interest outside of Japan), where many young Japanese no longer have a strong desire to study abroad or connect with the international world. Yashima also discusses the saliency of researching *willingness to communicate*, as she reintroduces her now famous “International Posture” as a critical part of motivation.

These few Japanese phrases reflect quite a paradox of forces pulling language learners both toward and away from English. Thus while many are drawn to the language as a bridge to the world, others retreat with a dearth of motivation.

Several of LLMJ’s chapters discuss in detail the causes of demotivation among Japanese language learners. Among others, Keita Kikuchi’s chapter, “Demotivators in the Japanese EFL Context”, will raise hackles among many

educators with the reporting on “teacher misbehaviors.” Along with many noteworthy observations on teacher-student relationships, the data presents such demotivators as teachers’ “negative physical appearance” and “nagging.” While this may reflect some students’ equation of “nice and good looking = good teacher,” classmate, parent, administration, and society misbehaviors go underrepresented. Such factors outside of the classroom also heavily influence learners. The chapters on demotivation raise important issues but at the same time seem to discount other crucial ones.

Suffice it to say, the book does a superb job of showing the knotted-up nature of its subject matter, and why Japan in particular has recently emerged as a hotbed for research, as bilingual Canada did in the past. While solution-seeking teachers, learners, parents, administrators, etc., looking for actionable, “plug-and-play” help with motivation may put the book down in dismay, hopeful researchers may rejoice. The chapters become a textbook on mixed methodologies, from meta-analyses, to structural equation modeling, to case studies, to finding innovative ways to investigate Dynamic Systems and Self-discrepancy Theories. Moreover, “needs further research” scavengers can feast on numerous untouched territories toward which the authors helpfully point.

As an example of *further* in terms of needing further research, the pool of participants represented in LLMJ could be usefully expanded in order to justify the comprehensiveness suggested by the title’s *in Japan*. While a few chapters mention high school students, and Rieko Nishida in chapter 6, “A Comprehensive Summary of Empirical Studies of Motivation among Japanese Elementary School EFL Learners”, lasers in on a meta-analysis of elementary school studies, most of the research centers on university students that may not represent the country’s population at large. However, ideas such as analyzing voice diaries and pushing beyond action research to *looping*, where students actually participate in and respond to the data collection, again make LLMJ a good choice for readers interested in the field of researching motivation and the context of Japan.

The imperative issue of willingness to communicate (WTC) makes appearances in Yashima’s chapter 3 (as mentioned above) and also in Kikuchi’s

chapter on demotivation, and Nitta's "Understanding Motivational Evolution in the EFL Classroom: A Longitudinal Study from a Dynamic Systems Perspective". However WTC does not receive the attention it perhaps warrants in a country where getting learners to speak up and use the target language seems such a ubiquitous concern.

Another near omission is that of the Contact Hypothesis (CH), a social psychology theory which can tackle so many of the issues running through Japan. Aubry and Nolan's chapter 8, "Effect of Intercultural Contact on L2 Motivation: A Comparative Study", mentions CH in passing as a foundation for their intriguing voice-diary study of two university campuses with very different numbers of visiting international students, and how international contact can positively affect the effort and enjoyment of language learning. Also, the article's appendix offers some useful questionnaire items ready to use to investigate learners' "international posture." Nonetheless, the CH could have been used to spotlight an elephant that sits in the room of the whole task taken on by LLMJ.

LLMJ only lightly touches on the main tenants of CH, which include *equal status* and *friendship potential*, two elements vital to the Japanese context. The chapters barely acknowledge the pervasive influence of *senpai/kohai* (seniority-based) relationships, club membership, and epidemic bullying at all levels of society. Certainly anyone with experience in Japan recognizes that these *intra-cultural* powerhouses can cause drastic fluctuations in attitudes and behavior. Yet, LLMJ by and large ignores these elephants, almost as if hoodwinked by *honne-tatemae* (hiding one's true feelings from public view) and the dangerous subtlety and consequences of *KY* (incorrectly reading the atmosphere of how others are feeling in a situation).

The volume otherwise does an exemplary job of elegantly delineating the current state of *researching* language learning motivation and also the Japanese context. Readers interested in these areas will find this fine assemblage of chapters compelling and practical to their own research and understanding of the field.

Author's bio

Peter Edwards currently explores English language teaching from a neuro-education perspective. He holds an MA in Literature from UC Berkeley and a PhD in Second Language Acquisition from the University of Nottingham. Peter's research interests include how students' visiospatial and kinesthetic reasoning can unlock skills for critical thinking. pedwards@kansai-gaidai.ac.jp

Received: May 24, 2014

Accepted: June 17, 2014