LANCASTER UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS
AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Temporal perceptions of second language learning motivation - A Japanese context

By

Neil Thomas Millington

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, motivation has become recognized as crucial in language learning success. Researchers have conducted numerous of studies which have sought to explain why people select, perform, and continue to learn a language. The results and findings of these studies allow us a greater understanding of second language (L2) learning motivation. However, one area of language learning motivation research that has not received as much attention is the temporal aspect of motivational fluctuations. In recent years, there have been calls for a more widespread adoption of qualitative research methods to investigate what Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) describe as the dynamic processes of a learner's' motivational development. This thesis is a response to those calls.

This thesis attempts to discover perceptions of language learning motivation. In particular, the research reported in this thesis is an attempt to develop a greater understanding of temporal motivational fluctuations of Japanese university L2 learners. As such, the overall aim of this longitudinal qualitative study is to explore the temporal progression of the motivational thinking of three different age groups of Japanese university learners. More specifically, this research sheds light on the motivations of L2 learners in a medium-sized university in Japan, discovers similarities and differences in language learning motivation between different age groups of university learners, and determines how their language learning motivation fluctuates over the period of an academic year.

The tools of inquiry used in this qualitative research project were interviews and diaries. Three sets of interviews were conducted with 23 learners in a Japanese university over the course of an academic year. Seven of the participants were freshmen students and seven were in their second year. The remaining nine were in the third grade. Participants completed and submitted a total of seven diary entries at regular intervals throughout the study and these were used to inform the second and third rounds of interviews. The overall findings showed that the learners in each grade were influenced by both their sociohistorical and cultural context and their values and goals at the start of the study. During the middle of the academic year, these goals and values were placed on hold as their immediate context seemed to have more motivational influence. Towards the end of the study the values and goals returned to

play a more prominent role in their language learning motivation. There were also several subtle differences in the motivation of the three age groups and this could be seen most clearly in the educational context where institutional pressures were stronger for the older students in the study.

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