Introducing FOLLM: Forum on Language Learning Motivation

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Abstract

In this commentary, we first map out the reasons which make language learning (LL) motivation a crucial research field within the domain of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). However, while we recognise that researchers have made considerable progress in the attempt to theorise LL motivation, it is clear that the construct is difficult to define and investigate in its wholeness. Despite these challenges, influential work has been produced, and we offer a brief overview of the seminal publications which give LL motivation inquiry a sense of achievement and orientation. We conclude with a brief outline of the recent international academic events which have successfully gathered researchers and practitioners to discuss the new dimensions of LL motivation research, its application in teaching practice and new lines of inquiry. Finally, we introduce the international Forum on Language Learning Motivation (FOLLM) which has been set up with a view to building an international network of researchers and practitioners who have an active interest in LL motivation.

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**Introduction: Motivation**

Language learning motivation is one of the most prolific research areas in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Nonetheless, whereas a lot of research discussions have centred upon the notion of motivation within language learning, it has become apparent that no conceptualisation of motivation, to-date, has been able to theorise the fullness of such a construct (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 4). Ellis and Shintani (2014), for instance, offer a definition which incorporates many of the definitional components attached by researchers to motivation: ‘motivation is a complex construct that involves the reasons or goals learners have for learning an LL, the effort they put into learning and the attributes they form as a result of their attempts to learn (p. 287).’ However, although researchers have inevitably been selective in their conceptualisations of motivation and therefore unable to ‘capture the whole picture’ (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 4), we recognise, in line with Dörnyei and Ushioda, that motivation is concerned with ‘the direction and magnitude of human behaviour (…) in other words, motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, how hard they are going to pursue it ’ (p. 4).

**LL Motivation Research: Seminal Work**

Since the year 2000, the number of publications focusing on language learning (LL) motivation and psychology of language learning have been on the rise, and more researchers, especially research students who are new to the field, have benefited from these resources (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015). Amongst the most recent and impactful research outputs, it is worth mentioning the book *Teaching and Researching Motivation* (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) which offers a comprehensive overview of the theoretical frameworks of LL motivation between 1950s and 2009. Also, in a broader perspective, *The Psychology of the Language Learner* (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) focuses on other psychological factors in language learning, as well as motivation. Apart from these books, a number of other seminal publications focusing on LL motivation and psychological aspects of language acquisition include work by Mercer, Ryan, & Williams, (2012); Williams, Mercer, & Ryan (2015).

Also, special volumes have focussed on specific theories such as the LL motivational self system (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) and complex and dynamic system approaches (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015). Certain books have targeted individual geographical contexts such as Hungary (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006), Japan (Apple, Da Silva, & Fellner, 2013), and
Asia (Apple, Da Silva, & Fellner, 2016). On the other hand, in a more encompassing vein, with her volume *International Perspectives on Motivation*, Ushioda (2013) provides a picture of motivation which clearly shifts from context to context.

Moreover, resources for teachers have been published, aiming to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For instance, *Motivating Learning* (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013), drawing upon Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self system, introduces activities that could be used to motivate language learners in the classroom context.

The aforementioned list of seminal resources indicate that, since the pioneering work by Gardner and Lambert (1959) in Canada, work in the field of L2 motivation has proliferated, making it more obvious that motivation is a factor of language learning and teaching that merits close attention.

**Professional Meetings on L2 Motivation**

In recent years, L2 motivation researchers have successfully organised a number of events to gather like-minded researchers and language practitioners, thereby building an international platform to share views about researching L2 motivation and applying research outputs in classroom praxis. In June 2014, the conference *Psychology of Language Learning* (known as PLL) was held in Austria, and the organising committee was then taken over by researchers in Finland (PLL 2: 2016, Jyväskylä) and we are now looking forward to the next event in Japan (PLL 3: 2018, Tokyo). Also, in August 2014, the first ever conference focussing on language learning motivation (*International Conference on Motivational Dynamics and Second Language Acquisition*) was held in Nottingham, hosted by Zoltán Dörnyei and his colleagues.

**Forum on Language Learning Motivation**

In light of the above seminal work and the successful academic events which have emphasised the active research engagement with L2 motivation at international level, the *Forum on Language Learning Motivation* (FOLLM) was conceived as a research hub which will provide researchers and practitioners with opportunities to share views about the state-of-the-art research on language learning motivation. Each academic year, FOLLM will host a number of events in order to encourage researchers with a similar interest to share their own thoughts on current research output as well as disseminate their own findings. We believe that
good research is driven by practice and good practice is informed by research. Therefore, we hope to gather within this forum all those people who have experience and/or an interest in language teaching or learning practice and/or research. We aim to develop a network of ‘motivated’ people who wish to keep abreast of the leading-edge research in the field of motivational inquiry within English or any other language learning, teaching and research setting.

**FOLLM: Future Events**

The first FOLLM event will take place on the 21st March at the University of Warwick. Dr Martin Lamb from the University of Leeds will deliver an inaugural lecture by focussing on his recent publication *When Motivation Research Motivates: Issues in Longitudinal Investigations* (Lamb, 2016). Martin Lamb’s work represents an excellent starting point for FOLLM as he will offer insightful reflections on a successful longitudinal study which provide plenty of epistemological and methodological considerations for future L2 motivation research. Our next events will include one-day and half-day seminars where world-leading researchers will discuss their research experience and support novice researchers in the field. We will also invite research students to share their research in order to receive feedback from renowned L2 motivation scholars as well as peers. The ultimate aim is to provide researchers and practitioners actively interested in L2 motivation with frequent opportunities to network and share ideas whilst working on their research projects.
References


