

Examining Second Language Learning Environments and Their Impact on the Motivation of Migrants

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Abstract:

This case study utilized Q methodology to examine the Japanese as a second language learning motivation of three L1 English-speaking long-term residents of Japan. The L2 motivational self system (L2MSS) was used as a framework to explore the influence of the ideal self, ought-to self, and language learning environment on the participants' motivations to learn Japanese. The participants did a Q sort of 34 statements regarding their motivations to learn Japanese related to the constructs of the L2MSS, arranging the statements onto a grid in the shape of a quasi-normal distribution, with a range of values (+ 4 to - 4) to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with them. Post-sort interviews were conducted to provide context to the Q-sorts in which the participants were asked to elaborate on the statements they felt most strongly about and the thought process behind the choices they made. The participants were also prompted to reflect on how their motivation had changed over their more than 15 years in Japan. The interviews revealed that despite having similar learner profiles (e.g., gender, length of time in Japan, extent of formal Japanese education, L1), the participants expressed different degrees of motivation for learning the language and reasons for doing so. While the three shared a connection through their friendship, the participants' careers and social networks led to divergent language learning environments. These individual contexts in turn led to different motivations for learning Japanese. The first participant was driven by his job; he utilized Japanese at work and recognized that career advancement would be facilitated by fluent use of the language. His social circle of multilingual speakers also gave him another outlet for using Japanese. The second participant was motivated by personal development; he wanted to be able to convey and understand more nuanced meanings. He also found intellectual pleasure in mastery of the language. The third participant was mostly concerned with potential embarrassment and loss of face through not being able to communicate in Japanese. He had little interest in integrating into Japanese society beyond what was expected of him at work, and communication with his partner utilized a mixture of English and Japanese. The three participants also discussed how their motivational trajectory had changed over their time living in Japan, and the impact of key life events such as promotion and marriage on their motivation to learn the language. In addition, several demotivating factors were identified, such as the belief that they would never be able to integrate into Japanese society, the intent to return to their home country, and an introverted personality. While the motivations of learners should be examined within the context of the individual and their environment, studies such as this can lead to a greater understanding of why a migrant may choose to engage with or avoid the L1 of the country in which they live. The findings are discussed with the aim of identifying the factors which affect the motivations of long-term residents of Japan to learn Japanese.

Keywords: second language learning, language learning environment, L2MSS, Q methodology

