

Motivation and Identity: Analysing the Short Stories of L1 English-Speaking Immigrants in Japan

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Abstract:

Narrative inquiry has become increasingly prevalent in the social sciences because it elucidates how people use stories to make sense of their lived experiences. The analysis of narratives can reveal not only the narrator's perception of their own identity but also their relationship with the social environments in which they exist. This study utilized Q methodology and short story analysis to examine how motivation towards learning Japanese influences immigrants' perceptions of their own integration into society. The concourse for the 50-statement Q set was created using the responses of 80 L1 English-speaking long-term residents to a survey of seven open-ended questions about their motivation to learn Japanese. Q sorts and post-sort interviews were conducted with 45 participants and, following a principal components analysis using varimax rotation, a three-factor solution was chosen. The three factors were labelled Japanese Users, Japanese Learners, and Japanese Bypassers. Japanese Users utilized Japanese in their professional and private lives, seeing their usage of the language as an intrinsic part of their identity. Japanese Learners did not need to speak Japanese at work or home but strived to improve, believing that becoming more proficient would lead to a more fulfilling life in the country. Japanese Bypassers were comfortable not learning Japanese, reasoning that the significant time and effort required to learn the language was not a worthwhile investment. In the post-sort interviews the participants were asked to tell a story about a personally important experience that they had only been able to have because they could speak Japanese. The narratives of the three highest-loading participants in each factor were analysed to explore whether the motivation of the participants towards learning Japanese was reflected in the stories they told. Japanese Users told stories of atypical scenarios that could not be experienced without a high proficiency in the language. Japanese Learners shared experiences of commonplace encounters in which they were able to use the language effectively, allowing them to recognise their linguistic development. However, the stories of Japanese Bypassers related to the experience of living in Japan, rather than being about using Japanese. The stories were systematically examined through the three scales of context (i.e., the individual interactions, the communities they took place in, and the broader society) and the dimensions of the story content (i.e., who the narrator was speaking to, where the interaction took place, and when it took place). Through the stories that they tell, we can better understand how motivation shapes the lived experiences and identities of immigrants in Japan.

Keywords: Japanese as a second language, narrative inquiry, Q methodology, immigrant language learners