Intergroup encounters in English language learning: Modelling the impact of national identification

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Given that fundamental concepts such as language can either “diminish a sense of national identity or reinforce it” (Edensor, 2002: 29), this presentation contends that one of the most influential affective variables impacting upon English language education within the sociocultural context of Japan is attachment to an imagined Japanese nation (singular), or to be more precise, the respective strength of attitudinal attachment students hold toward various dimensions of nation identification. Within current language-learning literature, the direct impact of national identification has been largely overlooked. Neglected is the obvious fact that the evolution of a “sense of national identification” often begins prior to student encounters with a ”foreign” language and the ”foreign” nationals who speak it. For both the individual and the collective ”a national identity is formed and shaped first of all by domestic influences” (Pyle, 2007: 130) as part of conscious national education policy and planning. Motivated by the current void within mainstream language-learning literature, this presentation shares quantitative data collected from 1123 Japanese university students which sought to answer a single cardinal research question: What impact does the strength of attitudinal attachment students hold toward various dimensions of nation identification (i.e., commitment to national heritage, nationalism, patriotism and internationalism) have upon language-learner motivation within a university context that provides extensive intergroup contact opportunities with a population of non-Japanese “native speaker” English teachers? A broad analysis and discussion of the results will be offered and participants will be invited to consider the role of national identification in the learning of foreign languages.

Keywords: National Identity, Intergroup Dynamics, Japan.