When motivation research motivates: Issues in investigating long-term L2 motivational patterns

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Increasing awareness of how individual motivation to learn language can fluctuate and change puts a premium on longitudinal research methods which can track learners over set periods of time. Revisiting previous research participants is one means of effecting this. In this presentation I will report on follow-up studies of a research project in Indonesia, which produced qualitative data at five points in time (2002, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2013/15) on nine of the twelve learners in the original study. Thematic data analysis shows the durability of some self-concepts and dispositions, but also the presence of some 'motivational transformation episodes' (Shoaib & Dörnyei 2005) in several participants.

In this presentation I will focus on one of the more surprising findings, which was that my own interactions with the participants over the years had helped to shape their motivational trajectories. This influence appeared to come about through the authority participants invested in the researcher, and the inspiration they drew from extended contact with a foreigner. The findings therefore lend some support to the long-term motivating power of 'ought-to' and 'ideal' L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009). In highlighting these researcher effects, the presentation emphasises the need for motivation researchers, or indeed any researchers probing the psychological characteristics of language learners over time, to show reflexivity in designing and carrying out longitudinal studies, especially when interpreting interview data. The identification of possible negative effects in one learner also raises ethical issues about participant selection.

References


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