Students’ attitudes to English at a Swiss university: a study of selves, identities and persons in contexts

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The paper reports on the results and implications of a PhD study investigating university students’ attitudes toward English in multilingual Geneva, both as a global language and as part of the local curriculum. Although based on quantitative results obtained through an online questionnaire, the analysis presented identifies and challenges the limitations of traditional quantitative methodologies in L2 motivation research by placing special emphasis on the role of the multitude of contexts in which students participate in forming their language attitudes and motivation to learn English. The paper argues that this dynamic, person-in-context view of language learning as an aspect of identity creation, inspired by the latest developments in L2 motivation theory and research (c.f. Dörnyei, Henry, & MacIntyre, 2015), allows for a more thorough and meaningful interpretation of the results. Indeed, the findings indicate that elements of the social and economic spheres, both local and global, with which participants interact are reflected in their language attitudes and their self-concept. This is underlined by significant differences between Swiss and foreign students and among participants enrolled at different faculties. These conclusions highlight the importance of examining language learning in its various, dynamically interacting, contexts and language learners as individuals who actively navigate and shape their environment. Therefore, I argue that they are also suggestive of the potential of complex dynamic systems perspectives in SLA research (Verspoor, de Bot, & Lowie, 2011) and point at further dimensions of language learning motivation to be explored through emerging methodologies (Dörnyei et al., 2015).

References:


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