"This language still motivates me" – advanced language students and their L2-motivation

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In our paper, we present a pilot study belonging to our new research project MUMMI (multilingualism – usage – motivation – multiculturalism – identity) at the University of Helsinki. In an earlier project (TAITO) we have been interested in why language students start studying a foreign language at the university. In this project, we focus on students who have reached an advanced level in their studies of Swedish or German. Why are they still motivated? How do they see themselves as learners and users of these languages?

As our data, we have written reflections of advanced Finnish-speaking university students, by now 6 students of Swedish and 7 students of German. Our data collection is still in progress. The students have been asked to write about themselves as (advanced) students of Swedish/German, and about themselves as language users.

As our theoretical frame of reference we have the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) as well as the L2 motivation research by Dörnyei (e.g., Dörnyei 2006, 2009; Dörnyei & Skehan 2003; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011). We also plan to look at the phenomenon through a lens of narrative theory (Polkinghorne 1995; Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

Our preliminary results indicate that students of both Swedish and German stress their long-term interest in languages as well as work-related factors as reasons for continuing their studies of the language; also the role of inspiring teachers is evident. In addition, especially students of German seem to emphasize the role of their family as well as their stays abroad as important motivators.

Keywords: L2-motivation, advanced language students, narratives.