

Taking a 'small lens approach' to researching L2 motivation

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WARWICK
APPLIED LINGUISTICS


Overview of talk



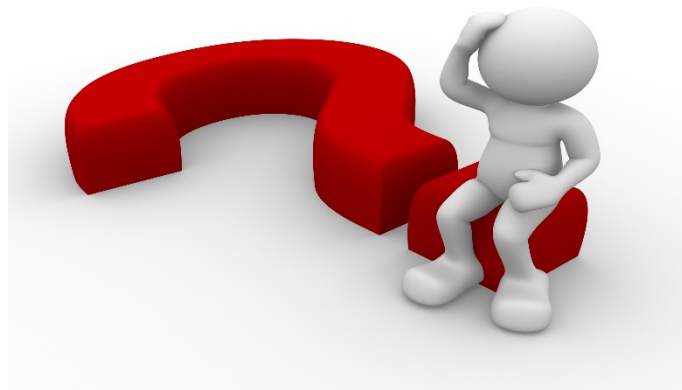
- Three ‘problems’ with L2 motivation research
 - Need for a more sharply focused research lens
- Some suggested approaches to researching L2 motivation ‘through a small lens’
- Based on
 - Ushioda, E. (2016). Language learning motivation through a small lens: A research agenda. *Language Teaching* 49(4): 564–77



Three 'problems' with L2 motivation research

1. Limitations of motivation research in SLA
 2. Popularity of motivation as a student dissertation topic
 3. Shortage of classroom-based practitioner research on motivation
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Problem 1



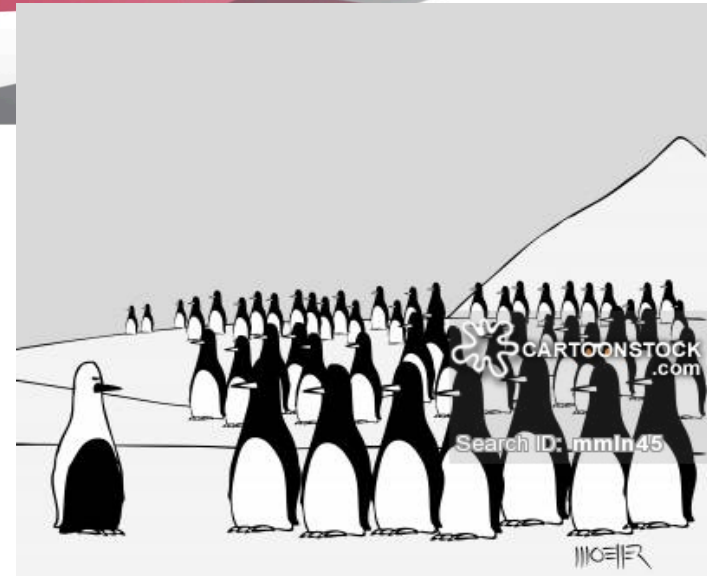
Limitations of motivation
research in SLA

Importance of motivation in SLA

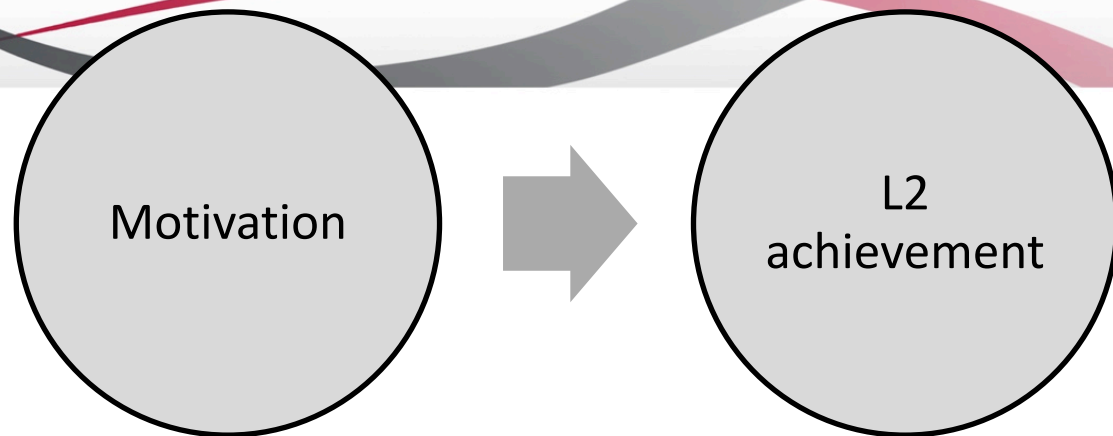
- 'given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data' (Corder 1967: 164)
- Motivation is widely recognized as a significant individual difference variable in L2 learning
- A key factor that distinguishes L2 learning from L1 learning
- Substantial body of research over 50 years, predating the 'birth' of SLA field in 1960s (see Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011 for overview)

But ...

- 'the study of L2 motivation research continues to lie outside mainstream SLA' (Ellis 2008: 690)
- Motivation has remained somewhat isolated from the core linguistic traditions of the SLA field (Ushioda 2010)



Why?



- Analysis of motivation and its role in L2 learning has mostly been at the level of global learning behaviours and achievement
- Motivation research has tended not to address fine-grained processes of language acquisition or linguistic development

Motivation research sheds little light on core SLA concerns ...

- How does motivation shape particular psycholinguistic processes or stages of L2 development?
- How does motivation relate to the acquisition of specific features of the target language?
 - E.g. pronunciation or accent (Segalowitz, Gatbonton & Trofimovich 2009)
- **Need for a sharper focus or smaller lens?**



Problem 2



Popularity of motivation as a student dissertation topic

Some thoughts from ...



Paul Meara
(speaking at EUROSOLA conference
in Cork, Ireland, 2009)

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Prototypical motivation study at Masters level ...

- Develop/adapt a motivation questionnaire
- Collect and analyse data
- Summarize findings (descriptive statistics)
- Possibly examine statistical relationships with other variables (e.g. achievement)
- Possibly integrate some interview data (mixed methods, triangulation)
- Draw (anticipated) conclusions

Such dissertations ...

- Tend to be rather boring and predictable
- May be bland and superficial
- Often lack a tight focus or deep engagement with a research issue
- May offer few interesting insights
- Desirability of a more sharply focused lens to suit the scope of a Masters project?

Problem 3

Shortage of classroom-based practitioner research on L2 motivation




Most empirical research on L2 motivation in classrooms ...

- Has been conducted by researchers who are external to the classroom settings, teachers and learners under focus
- Has characterized classroom settings in rather general terms only (e.g. cultural context, school type, proficiency level)





Few published studies of L2 motivation ...

- Have been grounded in specific contexts of practice
 - Have focused on the needs and experiences of particular learners and teachers in particular classrooms
 - Have been shaped by teachers' own pedagogically-oriented research inquiry (e.g. action research)
- 

Why?

- Teachers may feel that collecting self-report data on motivation from their own students may not yield reliable data
- Teachers may worry that their attempts to research their own students' motivation may end up influencing and changing their motivation and so 'contaminate' their data



Addressing these issues by ...

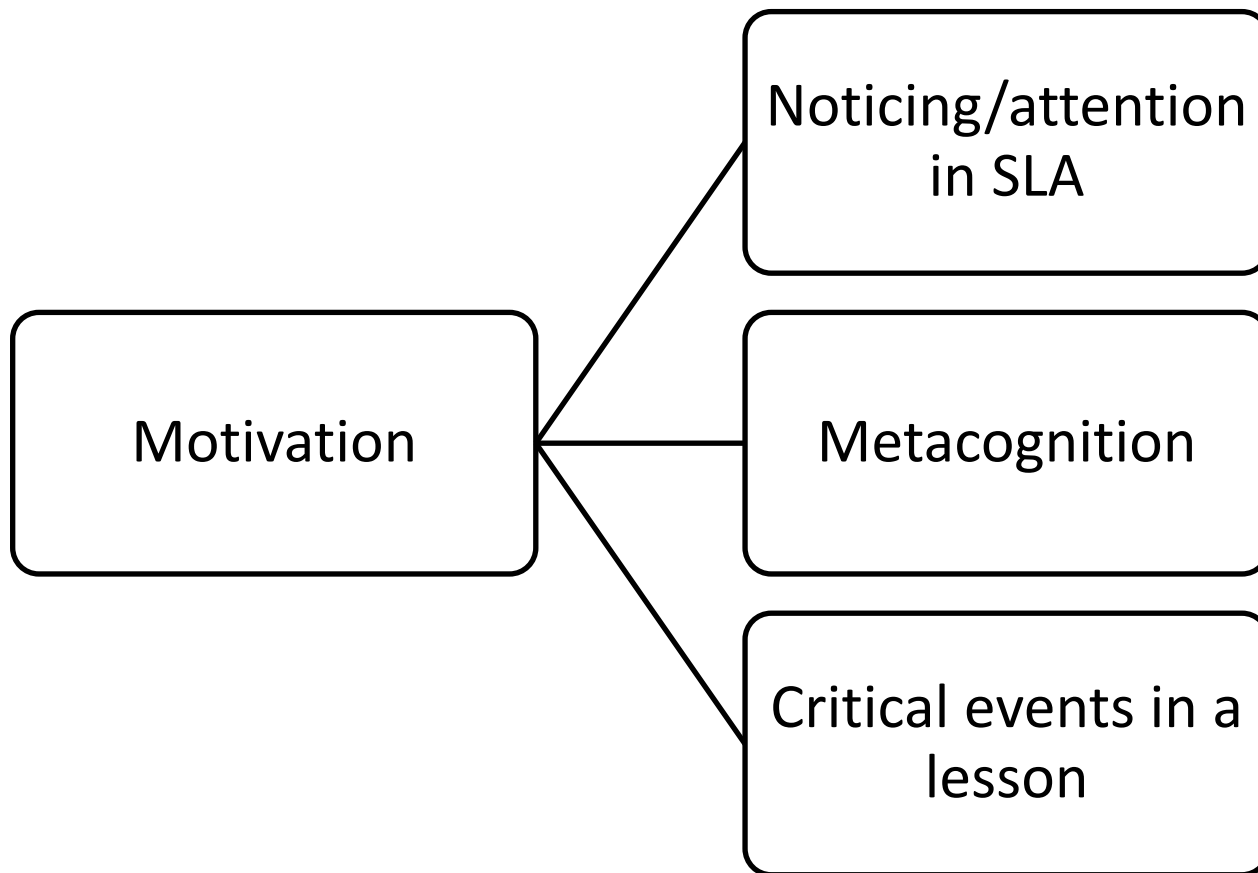
- Integrating (rather than separating) teaching and researching objectives (Ushioda 2013)
- Developing motivation 'research' tools that function also (or primarily) as 'pedagogical' tools to enhance students' voice and involvement in learning



So, lack of classroom-based research on L2 motivation means ...

- **Need for more sharply focused lens on**
 - How processes of motivation evolve through particular interactions and events in the classroom
 - How teachers can work responsively and adaptively to shape these interactions and events in motivationally constructive ways

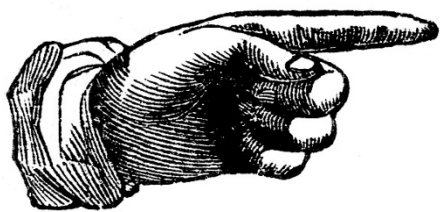
Possible 'small lens' approaches to researching L2 motivation



Noticing and attention in SLA

- Schmidt and Frota (1986)
- Research on visual input enhancement techniques for directing L2 learners' attention to particular target features in a text

Please Notice This



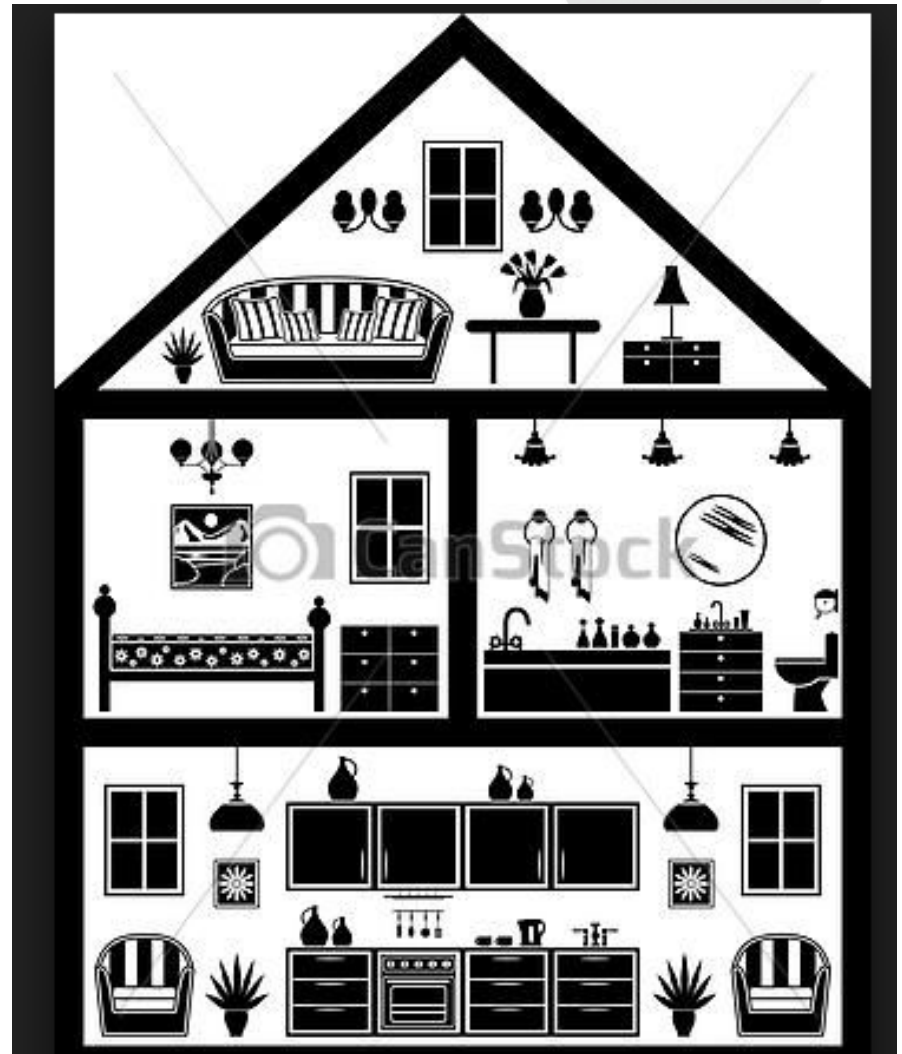
- E.g. Underlining, CAPITALISATION, **bold font**
- See Simard (2009) for review

Role of motivation in noticing?

- Does motivation play a role in whether learners notice and pay attention to certain language features, especially when input enhancement is not provided?
- Experimental research in psychology suggests that what people notice may partly depend on their motivation (Newsome 1986)



(Newsome 1986)



Role of motivation in noticing?

- Does motivation play a role in whether learners notice and pay attention to certain language features, especially when input enhancement is not provided?
- Experimental research in psychology suggests that what people notice may partly depend on their motivation (Newsome 1986)
- Test yourselves:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoy4>

Motivation and noticing in SLA

- Potential link between motivation and noticing in SLA highlighted by Crookes & Schmidt (1991)
 - But little empirical research to date
 - In contrast with research on noticing and attention in SLA in relation to other individual difference factors such as aptitude or working memory (e.g. Robinson 1997, 2002)

Takahashi 2005

- Motivation and noticing of pragmalinguistic features of L2 input
- Research focus on **request strategies**:
 - **complex bi-clausal request forms** (e.g. *I was wondering if you could VP; Do you think you could VP? Would it be possible for you to VP?*)

The **HOW TO BE BRITISH** Collection

1. Wrong



2. Right



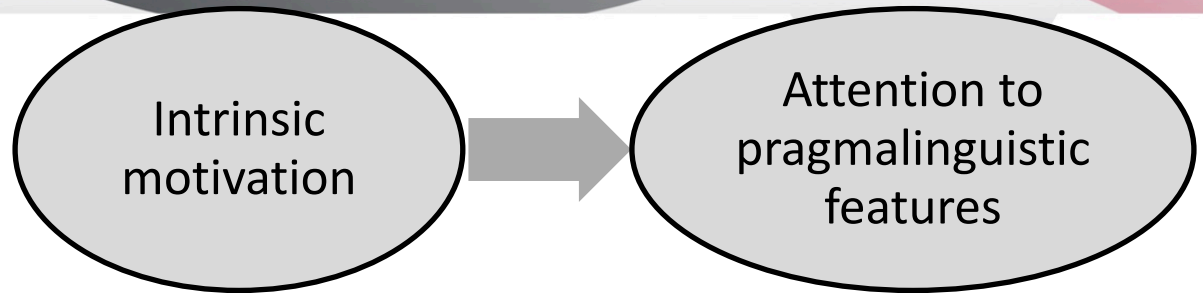
Takahashi 2005

- Motivation and noticing of pragmalinguistic features of L2 input
- Research focus on **request strategies**:
 - **complex bi-clausal request forms** (e.g. *I was wondering if you could VP; Do you think you could VP? Would it be possible for you to VP?*)
 - **idiomatic expressions** (e.g. *This has to do with ...; How ya doing?*)
 - non-idiomatic expressions (e.g. *I live next door*)
 - discourse markers (e.g. *well, you know, maybe*)

Research design

- Participants (Japanese EFL university students)
 - completed a motivation questionnaire and English proficiency measure
 - read transcripts of role-plays of request scenarios (NS-NS and NS-NNS role-plays)
 - completed an awareness retrospection questionnaire to identify expressions and features of language use in the role-plays perceived to be distinctively ‘native English’ usage

Results



- Participants classified as strongly intrinsically motivated to learn English were found to be particularly attentive to complex bi-clausal request forms and idiomatic expressions in the input, irrespective of their levels of English proficiency
- Intrinsic motivation to develop communication skills may help direct learners' attention to pragmalinguistic features perceived as important for effective communication

Implications

- A 'small lens approach' can shed light on how motivation interacts with learners' attentional focus and resources
- Possibilities of replicating Takahashi's research or extending it to other target L2 features (e.g. phonology, prosody, lexis, syntax ...)
- How differences in motivation may contribute to different patterns of linguistic and communicative proficiency

Motivation and metacognition

- How motivation interacts with attention may also connect with **metacognitive processes** – i.e. processes of directing and regulating one's cognitive resources

Example

(Harsch, Ushioda & Ladroue, in press)

- An international student is talking about his motivation to develop his English vocabulary and how he uses **the strategy of paying close attention to words and phrases in his interlocutor's speech** ... nicely demonstrated during the actual research interview:

Interv: Okay, so your main focus is on expression and vocabulary?

S016: Exactly. See now I didn't have the word 'expression' in me. So I learnt from you now.

Motivation and metacognition

will and skill

(McCombs & Marzano 1990)

Metacognitive
skills and strategic
thinking and
learning processes

Motivation or
willingness to
apply and control
thinking processes



'Will and skill' research in SLA

- Tends to focus on associations between motivation and strategy use (quantity, frequency, type)
- But how does motivation ('will') to control strategic thinking ('skill') develop?
- How can a teacher scaffold and support this process in her interactions with students?
- Taking a 'small lens' approach ...

Vygotskian perspectives

- Research in a Vygotskian sociocultural framework (Vygotsky 1978; Ushioda 2003)
- Analytical focus on:
 - microgenesis of individual strategic thinking
 - and, by extension, of individual motivation to control and shape this thinking
 - through problem-focused interactions between teacher and learner (or between learners)

Possible research questions

- How do teachers motivate language learners to think through problems and difficulties in their learning?
- How do learners co-construct their motivation to think through problems and challenges in collaborative language tasks?



Possibilities for teacher research

- Action research focusing on how to plan and structure the pedagogical dialogue with learners to motivate strategic thinking
- Experiment with different questioning techniques and forms of encouragement (e.g. Diaz et al. 1990 on 'relinquishing strategies')
- Analysis of recorded teacher–learner or learner–learner interactions
- Stimulated recall interviews with learners

Motivation and 'critical events' in a lesson

- Problem-focused learning difficulties represent one set of events where motivation may be implicated
- Possible other 'critical events' during a lesson affecting and affected by individual and social processes of motivation

Unexpected interruptions

Heated exchanges

Silence in response to teacher questions

Critical incident analysis



- Important tool of qualitative inquiry in teacher development (Tripp 1993) and other fields of professional practice (e.g. nursing, social work, organisational learning)
- See Butterfield et al. 2005 for historical overview of critical incident technique
- However, identifying 'critical incidents' is not straightforward



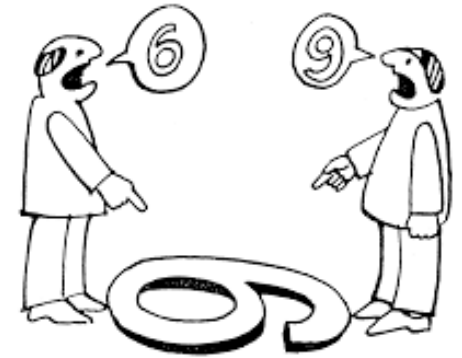
Critical events in the classroom

- Focusing on a critical event provides a tightly bound contextual framework for analysing how motivation evolves among ‘persons-in-context’ (Ushioda 2009)
- While the critical event constitutes the immediate focus (‘small lens’), the analysis will have wider contextual perspectives (shared history of previous interactions, subsequent interactions and events)
- May yield insights into how processes of motivation evolve cumulatively among teacher and learners in a particular classroom

Possible research inquiry

- Investigate the motivations of teacher and learners during ‘critical events’ in a lesson
- How to define ‘critical events’?
 - Events that cause us to wonder why people are behaving in a particular way?
 - Involve learners in identifying critical events where issues of motivation have surfaced?

Research approach



- Multiple perspectives on the critical event (research-observer; teacher; students)
- Or particularly suited to teacher research and especially Exploratory Practice (EP)
 - Allwright 2003; Allwright & Hanks 2009; Hanks 2017
 - Research inquiry grounded in teacher's own practice and shaped by pedagogical principles
 - Desire to understand and enhance quality of classroom life
 - Involving learners as co-researchers
 - Congruence between pedagogical and research tools

